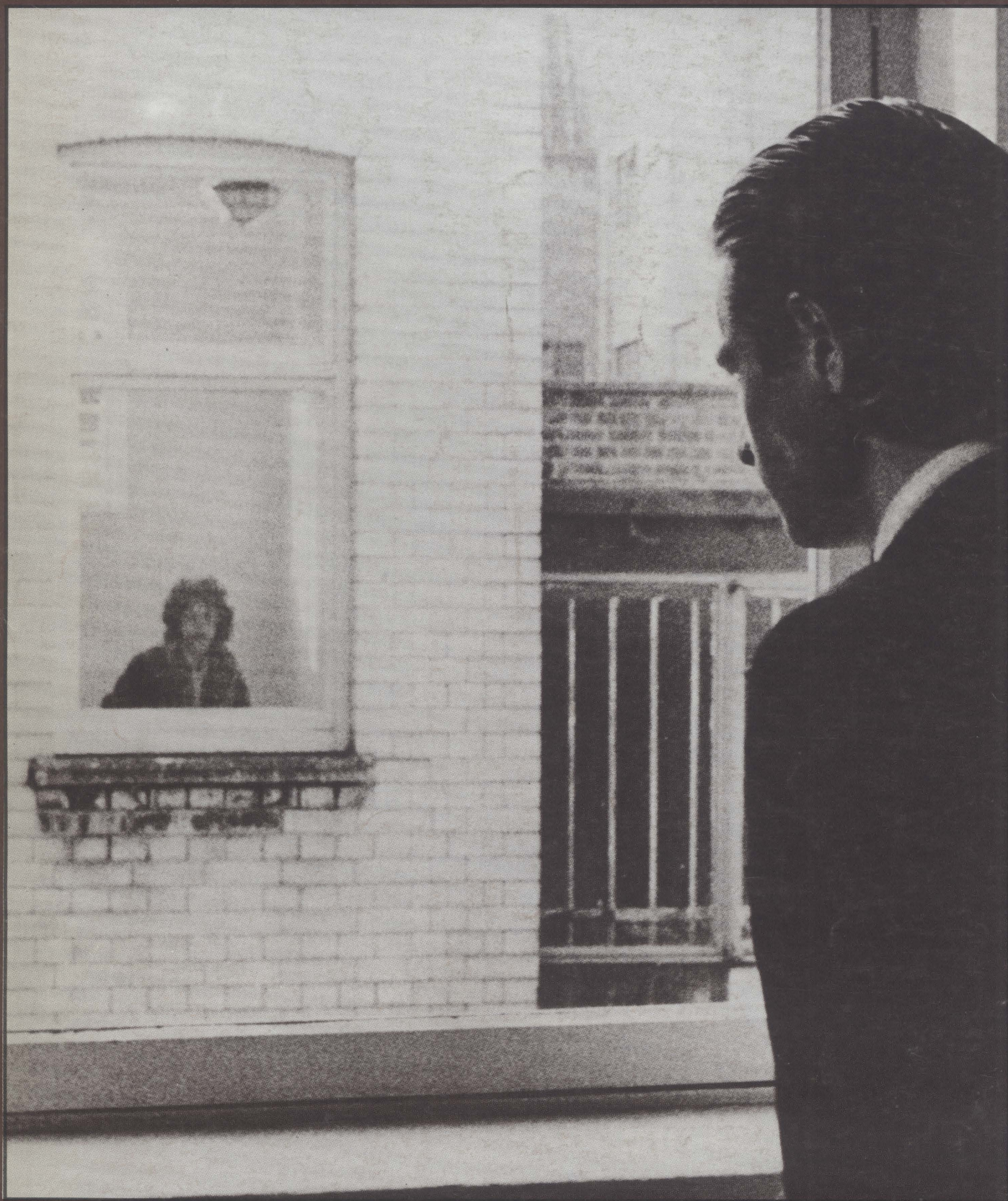




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AUTUMN 1979

# SIGHT AND SOUND

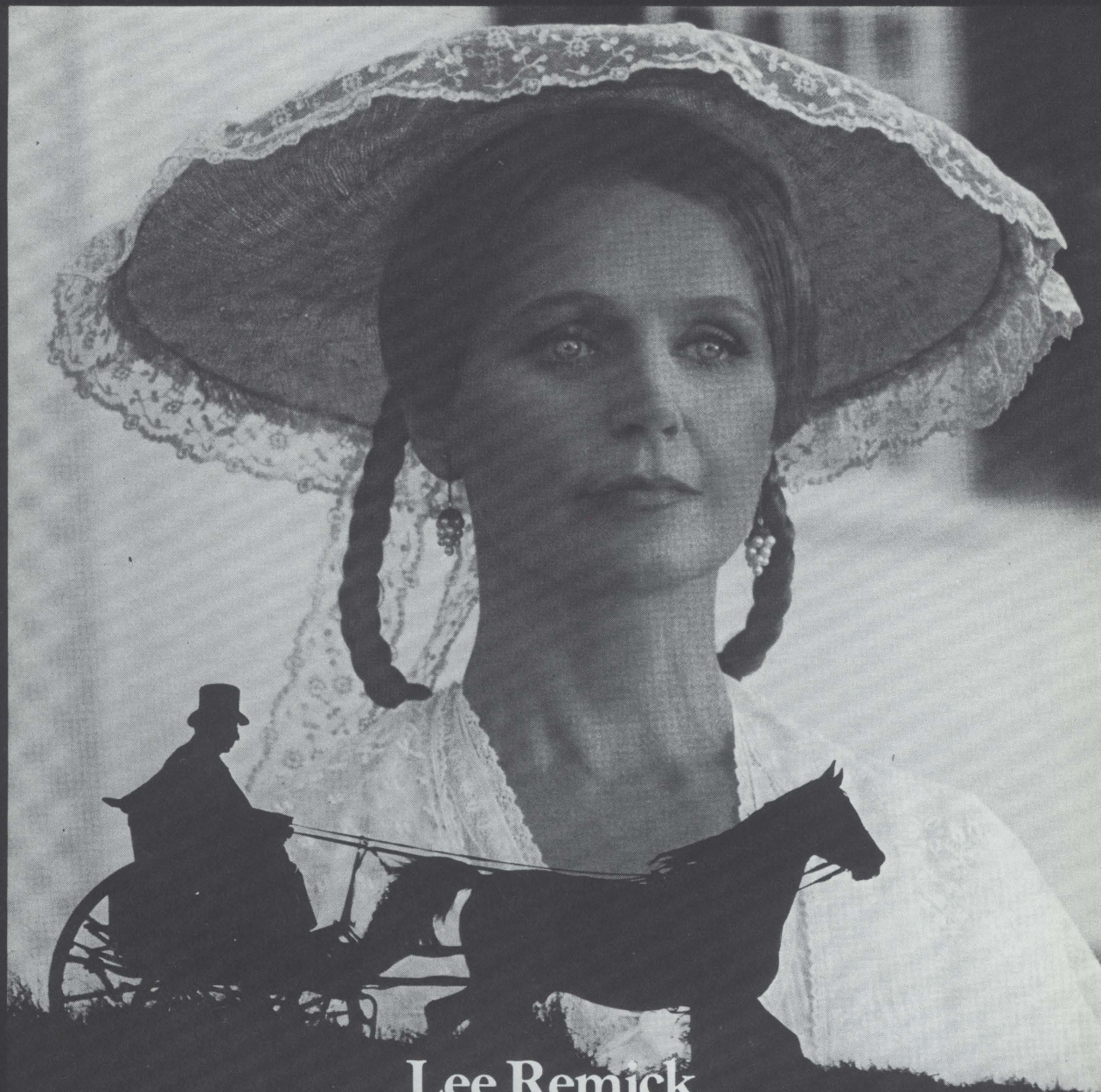




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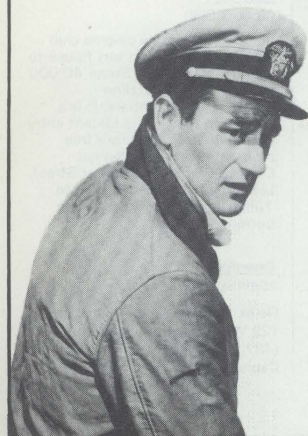
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Dipping at random into the cornucopia of some seventy films to be shown, one finds a truly sumptuously photographed Indian film, *Junoon*, directed by Shyam Benegal and starring one of India's superstars, Shashi Kapoor. Then there are three French films, all directed by South Americans: *Ecoute Voir* by Hugo Santiago, *Hypothesis of a Stolen Picture* by Raoul Ruiz and *La Mémoire Courte* by Eduardo de Gregorio. And there is a film début which was widely acclaimed at Cannes: *My Brilliant Career* by the young Australian woman director Gill Armstrong. As usual, films by eminent established directors will have their first British showing in the cadre of the Festival and these will include Fellini's *Orchestra Rehearsal*. As in last year's event, there will be special sections of Action and Horror Films, British Independent Cinema and New Directors, all making up a two weeks hectic and dazzling kaleidoscope of celluloid.



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# SIGHT AND SOUND

AUTUMN 1979

Volume 48 No. 4

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*On the cover: Chris Petit's 'Radio On',  
made for the BFI Production Board*

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# ELECTION



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## A TELEVISION ELECTION?

David Wilson

In the entrance hall of Broadcasting House in London there is a Latin inscription. After invoking the banishment of all things inimical to peace and purity, it ends with a prayer 'that the people, inclining their ears to whatever things are beautiful and honest and of good report, may tread the paths of wisdom and righteousness.' The sentiment enshrines the Reithian tradition of public service broadcasting. And if it has been slightly tarnished in the five decades since its principles were first enunciated, it survives more or less intact in the one area of broadcasting where the broadcasters' own, much rehearsed idea of their function is tempered by circumstances beyond their control. The relationship between broadcasting and the state is complex and controversial. Its ambiguities are endlessly debated, not least by the broadcasters themselves. And nowhere are those ambiguities more sharply focused than in the way television covers a general election.

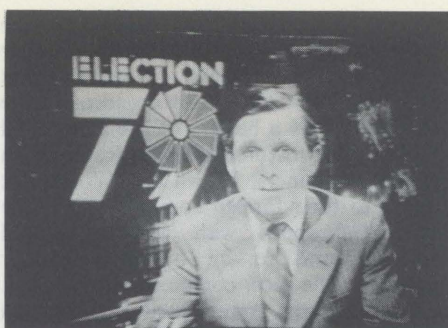


For most people in Britain, voting in a general election is their only form of direct political action. And since television is, as the BBC's chairman Sir Michael Swann (from whom I take my opening text) has described it, 'the massiest of the mass media', which is to say the medium from which most people derive most of their political information, how television reports a general election is in a parliamentary democracy of inestimable importance. It is only fairly recently that this has been obvious. Until 1959 television participation in elections was monopolised by the political parties, under the terms of an agreement between the three main parties and the broadcasting organisations. The 1949 Representation of the People Act had placed statutory constraints on the broadcast appearance of political candidates, and television news bulletins expressly excluded reference to election campaigns. When the *Daily Mirror* carried a front-page polling day appeal in 1959, 'To Hell With the Telly Until We've All Voted', what they meant was television in general, not the television coverage of the election. Twenty years later such a headline might be taken specifically to refer to the election on television.

What has happened in those twenty years is that the broadcasters have usurped the parties' monopoly. The relationship between the political parties and television has progressed from contempt to love-hate to a bond of political necessity. The parties still reserve to themselves the making of party political broadcasts; but as far as television and elections is concerned, they have accepted a shot-gun marriage and would not contemplate divorce. If 1959 was 'the first television election', it was so at the discretion of the parties. In 1979 it seemed at times that the election was being held at the discretion of television.

But does that mean that what we have now is a television election? It has been suggested, notably by Trevor Pateman in his monograph on television and the February 1974 election, that since the election campaign no longer has an existence independent of television, in the sense that the political parties organise their campaign in ways dictated by the presence of the mass media in general and television in particular, we should not talk of television coverage of an election but of a television election. If the television audience—the voters—experience an election campaign mostly through television (in the EEC direct elections in June, many voters in Britain experienced the campaign *only* through television), it follows, according to this thesis, that an election as a political event and an election as a television event are, by and large, one and the same thing.

This view of television and the election is implicitly supported by many of the public pronouncements of the broadcasters themselves. Sir Michael Swann again, talking of the February 1974 election: 'But if the election has done nothing else, it has shown that a lot of people do not want to be confronted with potentially divisive decisions between left and right wing solutions. Broadcasting brought home (quite literally) to them two very different and distinctive patterns for the solution of our troubles, and enough people rejected both to make the full implementation of either impossible.' Television, in other words, was a powerful agent in swaying many voters away from the



Informing the voters: ITN news; 'Election Panorama'; 'Campaign 79'; 'The Money Programme'

main currents of the two major political parties and towards the safe haven of some (undefined) middle ground.

The argument is seductive (and disturbing). It has been much used in recent years to account in part for the supposed political volatility of British voters; and its implications were the foundation of the Liberal party's main appeal to voters during the 1979 campaign. But it seems to me an oversimplified view of the relationship between television and elections. Not least because, if it were valid, the Liberal party might have expected not to lose so many votes in the 1979 election to a Conservative party some considerable distance to the right of even a broadly interpreted middle ground. I want to argue here, by looking at television's coverage of the 1979 election, that the relations between television and elections—and therefore between television and the state—are more subtle than is allowed by the view that what happened in Britain in the spring of this year can be described as 'a television election'.

First, briefly, the political context—important because to a large extent, and in accordance with television's view of itself as 'a window on the world', it preshapes television coverage of an election. (Both the 1974 elections were seen as a debate about 'national unity'.) The Labour government, elected in October 1974 with a bare majority, and surviving for the last sixteen months of its life by a pact with the Liberals, was defeated on 28 March on a vote of confidence arising out of the inconclusive result of the recent devolution referendum in Scotland. On 29 March, Prime Minister James Callaghan fixed the general election date for 3 May, and that same evening appeared on television in a 'Ministerial broadcast'. The following day Airey Neave, Tory spokesman on Northern Ireland, was assassinated by a car bomb in the precincts of the House of Commons, an event which produced immediate speculation that the election campaign would be fought against a background of political ('terrorist') violence. Wrong, as it happened: the campaign began in an atmosphere of public rancour after a winter of discontent. Widespread strikes, particularly among public service workers, had followed the government's attempt to hold down wage increases to a general level somewhat below the inflation rate.

The most graphic effects of these strikes (piles of rotting garbage, empty shelves in supermarkets) had been shown on television news bulletins, subsequently cannibalised by the Conservatives for use in a party political broadcast. Political control of the trade unions seemed likely to be the dominant issue of the election, with the Conservatives promising (unspecified) reform of industrial relations law and the Labour party insisting that tighter legal controls were dangerously impracticable and seeking support instead for its recently concluded 'concordat' with the unions. It was identified as a dominant issue early in the campaign by Brian Walden, presenter of London Weekend Television's highly regarded current affairs programme *Weekend World* (and himself a former Labour M.P.). Walden introduced a programme on the trade unions with the statement that there was 'a fairly general feeling that the unions have a lot to do with what's wrong with Britain', and the programme proceeded on the *assumption* that more legal controls on unions were desirable. It was a theme echoed on television throughout the campaign. Yet on the same day as this *Weekend World* programme, Independent Television News reported on a specially commissioned poll which revealed that, in the public's mind at least, inflation and taxation were the major issues of the election. This was later confirmed by the BBC's *Campaign 79*, which identified the dominant issues as inflation and wages. If this was a television election, television did not get off to a very good start in setting the agenda for the campaign.

In fact, the political parties exercise a much greater influence on the television coverage of an election than is sometimes supposed. To give just one example: to the astonishment of the foreign press, and in spite of a provocative intervention in the middle of the campaign by a prominent Irish American politician, Northern Ireland was not an issue in the election. James Callaghan was repeatedly



heckled at his public meetings by members of the Troops Out Movement (and was seen on television rebuking them), who wanted to make it an issue; but in deference to what amounts to a tri-partite policy on Northern Ireland, the main parties did not want it to be an issue, and television followed their wishes. The same is true, more or less, of the EEC (despite recent revelations of the cost of Britain's membership and the soon to be held elections for the European parliament) and of southern Africa (despite the election in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, which happened in the middle of Britain's own election and whose results have enormous implications for the future of British foreign policy). Both subjects were mentioned on television, but almost in passing. News bulletins, indeed, treated the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia election as an event entirely separate from the British election.

Television avoided these issues during the campaign because the parties avoided them. However the broadcasters themselves may define their role, an overall view of television coverage of the election forces the conclusion that what we are seeing is a precarious balancing act between television and the political parties; between television's highly developed notion of itself as an independent political commentator (and promoter of political understanding) and the constraints, whether of statute or convention, under which it is obliged to operate. The balance may tip one way or the other, and its movement can be variously interpreted. So let us consider the evidence. I want to look at the various types of election programme, their format and their content; and also to suggest what they reveal about the relations between television and the political parties.

The party political broadcasts are the only election programmes which the parties control on their own terms. (In Britain there is of course no other form of direct political advertising on television of the kind which punctuates American election campaigns.) Allocations are fixed by a joint committee of the parties and the broadcasting organisations (which is self-nominating and has no statutory authority), the central criterion being that a party must put up fifty candidates to guarantee broadcasting time. In 1979 the Labour and Conservative parties each broadcast five programmes of ten minutes; the Liberals three of ten minutes; the Workers' Revolutionary Party, the National Front and the Ecology Party one programme each of five minutes; the Scottish National Party three programmes of ten minutes, transmitted in Scotland only, and Plaid Cymru (the Welsh National Party) one programme of ten minutes, transmitted only in Wales. The conventions covering these allocations, which are based on an *aide mémoire* described by a senior BBC official as 'prehistoric', have been much criticised, and both the BBC and the IBA want them reviewed. The minor parties, on their own admission, use the broadcasts less to win votes than to recruit members: the Ecology Party fielded 53 candidates with this in view, ending their five minute anti-pollution message with a membership address.

Despite evidence that party politicals are the least favoured by viewers of election programmes, the parties did not reduce their length and frequency since the 1974 elections. The broadcasts were revealing of how the

parties construed their captive audience. The Conservatives, under the tutelage of their advertising agency, Saatchi and Saatchi, went for the hard sell. Their early broadcasts were characterised by a battery of live action and graphics. One featured a track race in which the British runners, Brown and Wood, lost ground to their foreign competitors as they were handicapped with weights labelled 'Inflation' and so on by their Labour managers. The race, commentated in television style, was punctuated by caption interludes in which various 'Facts' were spelt out ('Since Labour came to power we've had the worst peace-time inflation since the Great Plague . . .') and the phrase 'The Germans, the French and the Japanese', as Britain's economic competitors, was intoned like some incantatory spell. Disheartened, the stadium crowd—read the British people—called for a change of management, the Labour managers were 'sent in for an early bath' (a catchphrase of a popular television sports commentator, calculatedly used here to strike a chord in the minds of the television audience), and Brown and Wood raced home to victory after 'the dead weight of Labour government interference' had been lifted. Cut to Margaret Thatcher: 'We've always had a sense of humour' (though she seemed a bit sheepish about the example preceding) 'and heaven knows we've needed it lately . . . Give our people incentives and once again Britain will be back in the race.'

Subsequent Tory broadcasts played the same tune, though less stridently. Graphics and gimmickry were still used (a cash register filled with Labour's 'good intentions', a frozen pay packet, a globe sneezing with a slight chill but Mr Britain in bed with double pneumonia), but they were gradually replaced by party spokesmen talking direct to camera. The final broadcast had Mrs Thatcher, in hushed tones, addressing the nation in a speech which was a mélange of biblical/Churchillian rhetoric ('Let me give you my vision . . . Somewhere ahead lies greatness for our country. This I know in my heart . . . A land where all may grow but none may grow oppressive'), delivered as though from the throne and needing only a rendering of 'Land of Hope and Glory' to round it off.

Labour, as the party of recent government, wanted a quiet campaign, and this was reflected in their broadcasts. There was a modicum of graphic gimmickry—Tory 'promises' crumbling, a candle to conjure memories of the lights off winter of 1974, captions and 'facts' aplenty—but the emphasis was on 'experience', the appeal to voters to trust the party with the knowledge of government. Ministers were wheeled on to speak with the voice of authority (David Owen appeared with immense, learned-looking tomes in front of him); and the avuncular, Baldwinian, essentially conservative approach was climaxed in the final broadcast, two days before polling, which opened with a shot of 10 Downing Street at night, the single policeman at the door and the warm glow of the lights inside suggesting that the work of government was calmly in progress, and continued with Callaghan ruminating on the loneliness of a Prime Minister but emphasising the broad experience of his long political career.

The three Liberal broadcasts, in contrast to their excited approach in 1974 (when

they imitated the format of a television news programme), were models of propriety. The central plank of the Liberal party's platform was an appeal to the middle ground—a plague on both your houses and a prayer for a hung parliament—and this was mirrored in the common sense, no nonsense style of their broadcasts, their trump card being the patent sincerity of party leader David Steel, everyman's idea of the model, moderate citizen. The minor parties all suffered from having to compress their messages: they were boxed out by the three main parties, and in terms of television time might legitimately complain that they were under-represented.

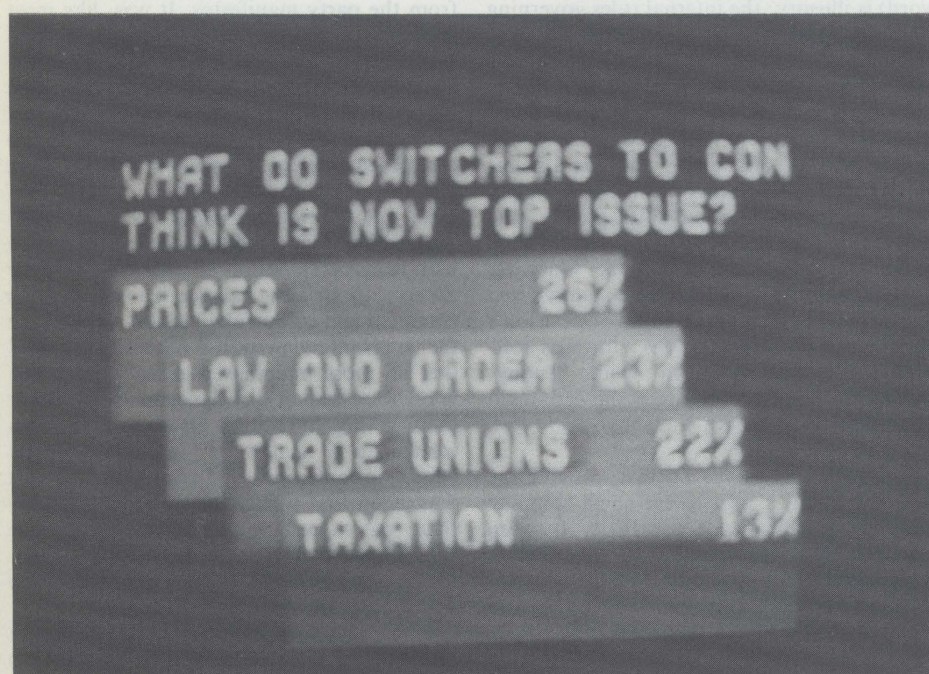
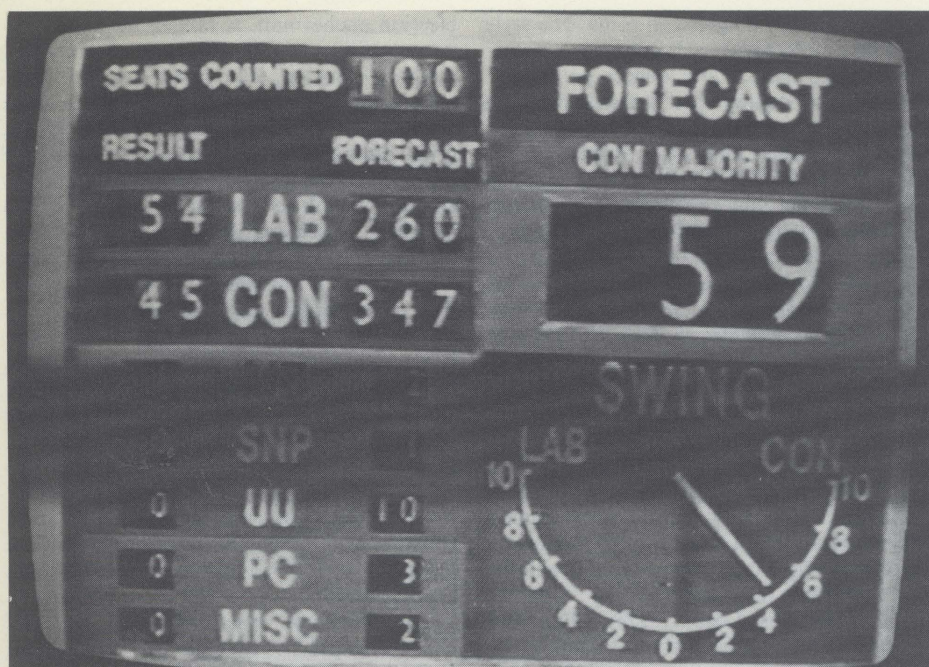
Interestingly, and a significant gloss on the notion of a 'television election', what evidence there is suggests that these party political broadcasts were popular with viewers in inverse proportion to the number of attention-holding devices they used. It is argued that since party political broadcasts (and indeed most election programmes) happen in the evening, when the viewing context is one of relaxation and of expecting to be entertained, those most likely to succeed are those which most meet audience expectations. Punchy graphics, frequent changes of image and voice and so on are supposed to keep the audience awake and interested. If this were true, on party political broadcasts the Tories should have won hands down. As it happens, a London *Evening Standard* readers' jury consistently marked down the Conservative broadcasts and thought the Liberals made much more impression—a view shared by everyone I have talked to about these broadcasts, whatever their political allegiance (with the exception, it should be said, of a man from an advertising agency). This is a verdict on presentation rather than political content, which in all the broadcasts never reached above the level of empty generalisations and emotive particulars. But it does seem to indicate that the television audience is less susceptible to coded messages, or more aware of how they are coded, than is often supposed.

Apart from agreeing their timing and providing technical facilities, the broadcasting organisations have no control over party political broadcasts. They observe other constraints on programming, such as cancelling any non-election programme which might be thought to have a bearing on the election. The BBC, for instance, postponed an edition of the arts magazine *Omnibus* in which a West Indian poet made what were coyly described as 'highly personal political judgments'; and a repeat of a Mike Yarwood show, which included an impersonation of Mrs Thatcher among others, was held up until election night—when, it might be thought, it probably did more damage to political 'credibility' than if it had been shown as scheduled. This apart, the broadcasters have a relatively free hand in their election coverage. I stress 'relatively'.

Election programmes can be conveniently divided into two categories. There are the regular news and current affairs programmes adapted for the election campaign; and special election programmes, culminating in the marathon coverage of the election results.

News programmes are, on the face of it, those over which the parties have least direct influence, though of course their daily doings form a large part of the programme content.





Election night graphics: predictions and polls

It is in the news broadcasts that British television's traditional separation of news and current affairs, 'fact' and comment, is most evident. The newscasters present the news items as they are structured by the programme editors: the sanctity of 'facts' ensures that they do not directly gloss what is shown (as happens on French television news, for instance). This may partly account for the curious division in the news programmes between the election and other news items, which were generally treated as events extraneous to the election and what it was about. The separation was even manifested physically. Both the BBC and ITV main evening news programmes were extended to accommodate the campaign, and the BBC newscasters, after reading the headlines, regularly handed over to the political editor, David Holmes, 'in our election studio'.

A complication here is the broadcasters' need to avoid interpolating into their election news any 'other' news item which could be interpreted as reflecting directly on one party

or another. Thus although there were a number of industrial relations stories during the election, and industrial relations was a theme in the campaign, the news programmes could not link any such items to any of the parties' policies on industrial relations. On television news, and particularly during an election, facts are sacred and events autonomous. Here again constraints are operating: in this case, the (political) requirement of British broadcasting that it should give an unbiased, balanced view of the news.

Whether that balance is possible or desirable or in fact achieved is another question. But some examples of the way news was treated during the election will serve to illustrate the profound implications of this required practice. Balance is no longer as strictly interpreted as it was during the 1959 election, when it was calculated that BBC news bulletins gave 1,875 lines to the Conservatives, 1,850 to Labour and 507 to the Liberals. But it still makes of election news coverage a transparently ritualised event. The

standard formula contains an extract from a speech by each of the three main party leaders, followed by items about the issue of the day, the latest opinion poll results, clips from the parties' morning news conferences (one news camera solemnly but uncertainly focused on a close-up of a telephone over which David Steel was talking from Scotland to journalists assembled in London), all preferably rounded off by a bit of light-hearted relief calculated to give offence to no party.

Thus ITV's main news on 16 April had extracts from speeches by Thatcher and Callaghan, a statement that Steel had attacked both Labour and Conservative administrations, and (presumably because the Liberals were felt to need a little more) a reporter watching the Liberal M.P. Cyril Smith shoehorn his considerable girth into a dodgem car in Morecambe. 'Head-on collision,' Mr Smith was heard to say, 'That's what politics are all about.' Back in the studio, it was concluded that 'the slightly phoney war of last week is over.' BBC-1's main news on 18 April led on the threat of a teachers' strike and statistics about average earnings. The election news had Callaghan on a walk-about in Hitchin balanced by Thatcher clutching a new-born calf in East Anglia; a clip from a Thatcher speech in which she answered a challenge made in the previous evening's Labour party political broadcast by saying that the Tories had no plans to increase health charges (which they did as soon as they were elected), balanced by an extract from a speech by Shirley Williams attacking the Tories for their 'abrasive' politics; a brief clip of Thatcher at a news conference; photographs of Steel (news conference) and Edward Heath (attacking Callaghan on the Common Market), which led into a film report on the Common Agricultural Policy, with Labour and Tory views briefly aired by respective spokesmen; the latest opinion poll; and brief items on the Scottish National Party, Northern Ireland, and the Plaid Cymru and National Front election manifestos.

I have chosen these news programmes at random, not for their particularities but for the general points they raise. First, the requirement of balanced coverage distorts the reality of the election campaign, creating the impression of a series of isolated events which relate to one another—and to the political issue at stake—only in so far as they follow one another in the oppositional structure of the news programme. Secondly, these events, or most of them, are essentially stage-managed, created out of a complicity between politicians and the media. The main public speeches are timed and structured partly with a view to ensuring that a suitable extract will fit the pattern of television programme scheduling. That practised television performer Harold Wilson used to repeat hecklers' comments, not so much for the benefit of his own audience but so that his repartee would not be lost on the television audience. In 1979 there appeared to be less heckling; but one of the most interesting incidentals of the television coverage was an interview with a sound engineer who explained how he amplified the speaker's microphone to drown out hecklers. Again, the constraints of balance ensure that news coverage gives a disproportionate emphasis



to the party leaders, even if what they are saying or doing does not meet the usual criteria for a newsworthy event: if you follow one leader, you must follow them all (all three, at least).

The preponderance of campaign coverage on the main evening news programmes demonstrates the *convenience* of television to the main parties. Coverage is not guaranteed (election news was by no means always the first item), but it is guaranteed that in time and treatment one party's coverage will be balanced with that of the others. News programmes earlier in the day, with the parties' morning conferences as their main source of material, were conspicuous for the amount of non-election news they carried. There was frequently an air of desperation: on ITV's lunchtime news one day the newscaster interviewed a Busy Lizzie plant wired for sound. Several times during the campaign television commentators openly remarked on the low-key atmosphere of this election. 'There's a feeling of waiting for the action still,' commented the BBC's political editor on 20 April, explaining that one reason for the relative calm might be that the Tory and Labour parties had inconsiderately arranged to hold their morning news conferences simultaneously. This decision, it was implied, had considerably reduced the opportunities to indulge the television spectator sport of 'confrontation'.

It was left to the current affairs programmes, ostensibly less constricted than the news bulletins, to beef up the action. Here confrontation is of the essence. Two editions of *Panorama*, flagship of the BBC's current affairs fleet, were given over to what presenter Robin Day called 'a new form of campaign television'. Under the shade of an outsize orange rosette, a Tory spokesman was invited to present the main points of his party's manifesto; he was then cross-examined by two Labour M.P.s. A week later, in accordance with the convention that the government party has the last say before polling day, Labour had their turn. (The Liberals had already appeared, their relative political standing relegating them to the late evening *Campaign 79*, which has a smaller audience than *Panorama*.)

These *Panorama* programmes were extraordinarily revealing of the codes and practices of political, and especially election, television. They were addressed not just to an audience but to an audience of voters, and were structured and presented so as to create the impression that these fireside voters were privileged participants in a political drama of which those in the television studio were merely the stage managers. The party spokesmen talked straight to camera, not to the people in the studio but to the People out there. Robin Day asked them 'to help if possible to bring the issues into sharper focus for the benefit of those who may feel that the arguments so far have been dull, stale or confusing.'

The choice of Robin Day to umpire these proceedings is itself revealing. Doyen of television's political interviewers, he is associated in the public mind as a 'tough' questioner who smokes out wily politicians and acts for the viewers as, in Day's own words, one of 'their inquiring representatives in strange places, their persistent fact-finders in confused situations.' Day firmly set the rules for these programmes, stamping on any

deviation from the agreed formula. His style is a kind of interrogatory bonhomie, enabling him both to attract and deflect politicians' attempts to deploy his (often) personal acquaintance with them. (When Labour's Eric Varley called him 'Dear Robin' on the BBC's *Nationwide* programme, Day quipped 'That won't get you anywhere', then turned to a Liberal politician with 'Mr Penhaligon—or may I call you David?') His expertise as a questioner was graphically illustrated in the *Panorama* programmes by the politicians' lack of it. Day was clearly itching to get into the fray, and sometimes did.

Interviewers like Robin Day are concerned to project an image of themselves as champions of the public's 'right to know'. On ITV's *Weekend World*, Brian Walden fired some searching questions at a panel of party spokesmen following the programme's 'expert' analysis of the subject (taxation, economic policy) under discussion. Much the same format was adopted by BBC-2's distinctly up-market *Money Programme*. But the combative, probing stance adopted by these 'middlemen' (and how loaded is that word) is illusory: the internal rules governing these television debates ensure that the kind of question you and I might like to ask our elected representatives is seldom asked. James Callaghan walked off an ITV programme when his interviewer strayed outside the agreed area of discussion, and the Labour party elicited an apology from the company concerned when it was subsequently discovered that the offending question had been shown on American television. Margaret Thatcher reportedly refused to be interviewed by Llew Gardner on Thames Television's nationally networked *TV Eye*, and was soft-pedalled by his stand-in Denis Tuohy; though in fact Llew Gardner showed a kid glove deference to both Callaghan and Steel.

It is in the magazine format programme that one might expect to see some chipping away at the facade of complicity between television and the politicians. The BBC's weekday current affairs magazine *Tonight* was rechristened *Campaign 79* for the election and fronted by David Dimbleby, the BBC's

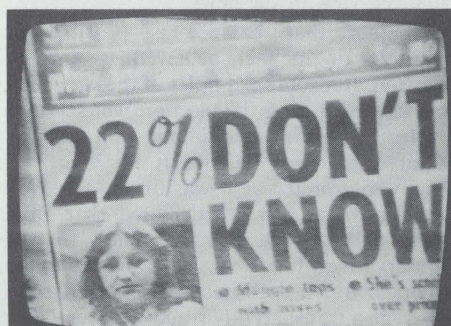
election anchorman. It ranged far and wide, constructing a nightly montage of interview, studio discussion, film report, opinion poll survey, and rounded off with a light-hearted 'Election Diary' which ranged from a theatre critic discoursing on Shakespeare's view of politicians ('He hated all forms of extremism, so I don't think he'd be out canvassing for the Workers' Revolutionary Party or the National Front') to a clip of Callaghan laughing at a Japanese journalist's accent. The characteristic approach was to identify the issue of the day. On 20 April, for instance, it was law and order (this was a few days before a National Front meeting in Southall, London provoked a violent clash between the police and Anti-Nazi League demonstrators). Dimbleby chaired a studio discussion on the subject between the Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees (on the stump in his own constituency, and so interviewed via a monitor) and the Conservative spokesman David Howell.

The discussion was introduced by brief clips from speeches by Thatcher (on law) and Callaghan (on the police) and quotations from the party manifestos. It was, like most such staged confrontations, unrevealing and inconclusive. The next item was race and the election. It opened by quoting from the National Front manifesto, and continued with a film report on the 'Asian vote' in the constituency of Leicester South. Film reports like this are a carefully structured blend of local colour, vox pop and the local candidates. The reporter contrives, in accordance with television's notion of what the audience expects, to strike a balance between serious comment and colourful diversion: in this case the voters interviewed (it is naturally assumed that all those interviewed actually intend to vote) were Indian girl dancers, asked about their voting intentions after we had been treated to a snatch of traditional Indian culture in contemporary Leicester. The report concluded that within the Asian community there was 'a certain bemusement about the significance attached to their voting intentions', thus explicitly separating the Asian voters from the rest of the electorate.

Robin Day then interviewed two Northern Ireland M.P.s (Ian Paisley and Gerry Fitt) about the propriety of an American politician's comments on the Irish question. And the programme concluded with brief diary items on fringe parties (Screaming Lord Sutch, the Wessex Nationalists, Auberon Waugh's one-man Dog Lovers' Party); on the problems of the party news conferences being simultaneous; and on the Tory campaign song 'Maggie's March', which played out *Campaign 79* over a montage of Thatcher electioneering pictures.

Programmes like *Campaign 79* provide paradigmatic illustrations of political television's obsession with form at the expense of content. During an election campaign, television does not even have the luxury of spreading its 'balance' over a series of programmes: each programme must be non-partisan, and must be seen to be so. This is not simply a television convention. The constituency report which forms a standard item of magazine programmes (and of some news programmes) is governed by statutory regulations concerning the appearance of candidates. The only way to avoid having all candidates appearing (unless a candidate agrees to his/her non-appearance) is to have

Press polls make TV news





none appear; a device used by reporter Bernard Falk in his constituency reports on Derby North for *Campaign 79*, which concentrated on the voting intentions of a musical society who were performing Gilbert and Sullivan's *Utopia Ltd.* (much heavy irony was extracted from the contemporary relevance of the opera's libretto). Tory M.P. Norman St. John Stevas imposed conditions for his appearance in a *Nationwide* constituency report: 'You've got one game and I've got another,' he told the interviewer.

The only election programme which interpreted these balancing constraints with some latitude was BBC-2's *Hustings*, shown very late and presumably watched by a distinctly minority audience. Extracts from electioneering speeches were presented at some length and with little or no editorial interpolation. Except, significantly, when the National Front leader was filmed at a street meeting accusing the media of being 'a tightly controlled Mafia' biased against his party; in irritation, perhaps, the programme editor conspicuously 'editorialised' this speech, cutting to a shot of a black policewoman when the candidate was outlining the Front's anti-immigrant policies. This editorial gloss illustrates another aspect of television's balancing act: it instinctively veers away from what it identifies as the 'extremist' fringes of politics. At the other end of the spectrum was David Dimbleby's hostility towards the secretary of the Anti-Nazi League (identified as a member of the Socialist Workers' party) when he appeared on *Campaign 79* following the Southall clash.

With the possible exception of *Hustings*, the keynote of television's coverage of the election was its preference for personalities over policies, format over content. The cast of characters is small; and the gap between broadcaster and politician narrows as the party spokesmen learn the art of television performance. A BBC Audience Research survey after the February 1974 election revealed a widespread impression of 'overkill' in the television coverage of that election. Which perhaps explains why in 1979 the more popular magazine programmes regularly included non-political items in their self-consciously miscellaneous approach. The BBC's *Nationwide* on 17 April, for instance, went from a heavily orchestrated constituency report to items on (among other things) real tennis, Hell's Angels and model railways. With the audience suitably lulled by this patchwork of comment and entertainment, it then switched to Robin Day and the 'election forum'.

A relatively recent innovation, the election forum perhaps represents a recognition by the broadcasters of audience dissatisfaction with the standard studio interview. Here—and there were several variations on the basic format—party spokesmen answer questions put by a random but politically balanced sample of voters, either in the studio or on the telephone. These programmes are calculated to produce a livelier debate than normal; though the presence of a television 'moderator' effectively rules out of court any but the very occasional divergence from the norm of question and answer sessions on political television. Their very popularity has now effectively institutionalised them, turned them into television events. Nowhere was this more apparent in 1979 than in the king of election forum programmes, the 'Granada

500'. 500 electors from Bolton, Lancashire (Granada Television's broadcasting area) were transported to London to put questions to the three main party leaders. They had prepared themselves for 'the big day', we were told, in a series of local programmes in which they had questioned non-party experts on 'the key issues'. Now, in London and on nationwide television, they were marshalled by a compère into giving 'a really warm Boltonian welcome' as, one by one, Steel, Thatcher and Callaghan were ceremoniously ushered in from the wings and led down a flight of stairs to face interrogation from these no nonsense voters.

The showbiz staging of this event was so contrived that it was impossible not to be reminded of *This is Your Life*. And a few days later, on election night itself, the panoply of the television election spectacular, newly oiled and polished, was wheeled out on both main channels to entertain us into the small hours with the race for the results. Rival computers, the 'swingometer', a plethora of



'Hustings': editorialising the National Front

predictions and pundits, graphics and town hall declarations—all the machinery of the television marathon swung into action. The gloves are off and it's time at last for the countdown. Robin Day celebrates the occasion by smoking large cigars. The BBC warms up with a self-congratulatory montage of previous election night programmes. There is, throughout, the sense of television as master of the political process.

'Mrs Thatcher is convinced that television is crucial in this election,' concluded a BBC report on the Conservative party's polishing of its image. But was it, after all, a television election? Television has certainly changed the style of electioneering, in the sense that many of the campaign doings of the party leaders are specifically geared to television. The rituals of television, its obsession with personalities, the legitimacy it tends to confer on such dubious manifestations of modern politics as public opinion polls, all can be seen as helping to deprive an election of its independence as a political event; particularly when television construes its own role not merely as a passive provider of information but as an active mobilising influence on the electorate. If the professional ideology of television practitioners determines the structuring of a political event as 'news', and if that news is then incorporated into television's process of ironing out real political division, can television be said to have altered significantly the very nature of an event such as an election?

I suspect that this assumption is at worst tautological, at best only partially true. For one thing, it ignores the fact that the election

does have an existence independent of television, as anyone who worked in it at a constituency level in 1979 would confirm. For another, it excludes the press coverage of the campaign. The constraints on political comment on television are not shared by the press. Most newspapers urged a Tory vote, and backed it with vitriolic attacks on the Labour party. 'Labour's Dirty Dozen,' screamed the *Daily Mail* on 25 April, listing '12 big lies' perpetrated by the Labour party (at least four of which have since proved to be nothing but the truth). 'Vote Tory This Time,' said the *Sun* on 3 May in a 'message to Labour supporters'. 'Don't Forget Last Winter,' pleaded the *Daily Express*, adding that 'A Liberal Vote is a Wasted Vote'. Smears and hysteria were the order of the day (the *Mail* identified a 'Screaming Mob of Left-Wing Extremists', and you had to read on to discover that they weren't even in Britain). In comparison, the *Daily Mirror*, the only popular national daily to back Labour, looked tamely reticent with its polling day message of 'Forward With the People'. Press and television fed on each other throughout the campaign; but the idea that British newspapers in recent years have become more pro or anti government than pro or anti party was stood on its head in this election.

Again, if television does 'homogenise' an election campaign, making it a nationally similar rather than a regionally distinctive event, one might have expected rather less regional variation in the voting than was in fact the case. And if television actually does mobilise the electorate, why historically is turn-out falling? One answer, it seems to me, is that the television audience is in its way as suspicious of the role of the medium in an election as those professional commentators who have 'identified' the tendencies outlined above. It may be that there is something about the nature of television, residing somewhere around its very rituals and repetitions and the very visibility of the constraints placed on it as a medium of political debate, which has implanted in the television audience, however unconsciously, a distrust of television as simply one more apparatus of the state. And that, paradoxically, at a time when television itself has been a significant (but by no means the only) influence on the growth of public hostility towards those institutions—political parties in particular—which are the basis of democratic society.

If that is true, the real question about television and elections is not whether we now have a 'television election', but whether by its tendency—particularly during election campaigns—to reinforce and promote consensus politics, based on a conflict of 'issues' rather than of opposed ideologies, television is contributing to a decline in political partisanship and therefore to a diminution in public awareness of what politics is about. That is a subject for further discussion. Meanwhile, my most enduring memory of the 1979 election on television is of a BBC reporter standing in the early hours of the morning at the end of a richly carpeted municipal corridor as he waited for James Callaghan to appear in his moment of defeat. Callaghan inconsiderately took another route, and the reporter was obliged to improvise on the town hall statuary around him. It was, in its way, the last word on the television election. ■





*'Eagle's Wing': Martin Sheen at the Indian burial ground; Sheen and Sam Waterston*



# THE ROMANTIC ENGLISHMAN

Anthony Harvey interviewed by Richard Combs and Tom Milne

In 1966, as Shirley Knight's white floozie teased staid black Al Freeman Jr. unto death on the New York subway in a flawless adaptation of LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman*, a new director had unmistakably emerged. His name was Anthony Harvey: ex-child actor, who had played Ptolemy in *Caesar and Cleopatra*; ex-editor, notably on Kubrick's *Lolita* and *Dr. Strangelove*; and surprisingly, given his understanding of the searing rhythms of LeRoi Jones' racio-sexual duologue, an Englishman.

Since then, tackling a variety of subjects with intelligence and the skill born of his editing experience, Harvey has made two British films for American companies (*The Lion in Winter*, *The Abdication*), two purely American movies (*They Might Be Giants*, *The Glass Menagerie*) and one TV venture (*The Disappearance of Aimée*). By an odd coincidence, his two latest films opened in London within weeks of each other: the Western *Eagle's Wing*, ironically, is a British film made in America for the Rank Organisation, while the less ambitious *Players* is an American film shot partly at Wimbledon.

ANTHONY HARVEY: I had a very mixed but marvellous chance as an editor because I worked with the Boultings, Anthony Asquith, Martin Ritt, Bryan Forbes and Stanley Kubrick. I was tremendously lucky to have that training, because in the cutting rooms you learn everything, the best and the worst. Now I really find it impossible not to cut every frame, but I work with an editor because if you don't have somebody to bat ideas around with you lose all sense of perspective. In the final analysis, however, it has to be your cut. *Players* was too long. I think one and a half hours, or one hour forty, is about the length you can sit in the cinema, unless it's something quite unique. We are all becoming self-indulgent.

Seeing your first film as director, *Dutchman*, one expected it to be well put together, possibly well directed, but what was striking was the way you worked with the actors. And this has continued to be one of your strengths. Is there any secret?

Simply that I started as an actor. My stepfather was an actor and I went to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, then into repertory, and realised that I wasn't going to be Albert Finney. The whole thing is not just making the actors trust you, but making them trust themselves. I think actors can do anything, and the more distinguished the actor the more he needs somebody he can trust. Acting to me is the most important thing in a film. If you don't get thrilling performances, it's very hard to hide even with the most ingenious editing. Some of the early Rossellini films, like *Open City*, which were rather rough technically, almost like newsreels, were so emotionally brilliant that one was swept away, although you really wouldn't imagine that enough of it would cut together. I think if you can get a really fine performance, to hell with the cut, to hell with the over-complex tracking shot. I'd even go

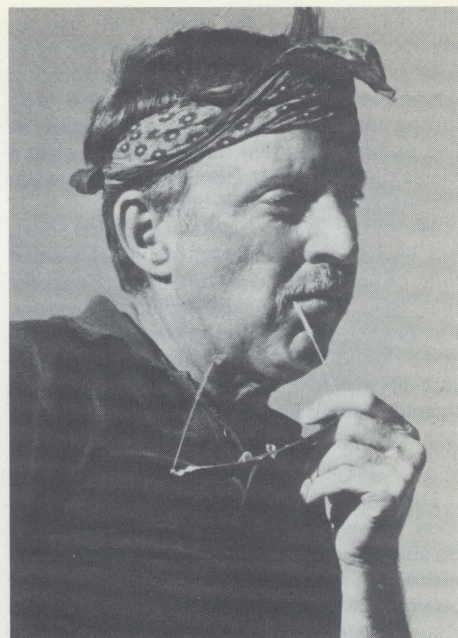
for lousy lighting as long as the emotion of that performance works. With luck one can get both, because I do believe a film should look extraordinary.

There's a good example in *The Lion in Winter*, in a scene where Katharine Hepburn is lying on the bed. She radiated an extraordinary sexuality, and although the scene was only supposed to go up to a certain point, she and Peter O'Toole became so carried away that we followed them around and went beyond the lights and still went on shooting. And in fact a lot of it was usable. That rarely happens.

If you are prepared to fit your conception to the actor, your approach is presumably very different from that of a director like Hitchcock, where everything has to fit his preconception.

I don't understand some of the great performances there have been in Hitchcock's films if he really treats actors like cattle. But the way he can actually plan shot by shot, so that it's almost like an editing plan, is extraordinary. You might sit in the loneliness of your hotel room with two actors and plan the night before exactly how you want to do it—which you do, because you obviously want to do some kind of homework. But when you get on to the set and you see the furniture and the light and the way one person reacts to another, all those preconceived ideas go right out of the window. It doesn't leave any spontaneity. Yet his films always have tremendous spontaneity in terms of technique. It's puzzling.

I like a script and I've been lucky to have LeRoi Jones or James Goldman or Tennessee Williams to provide a framework. But I always think a script is a map anyway, you don't stick rigidly to it. The thing now seems to be to get a group of people whom you think will be magic and hope the script comes later. But you have to have the script there



Anthony Harvey in Mexico

the week before you shoot, or whatever, in some kind of shape. It's always been a rule that I'll never break again. I did break it on *Players* because I thought it was a light comedy and that somehow we'd be able to pull through on our own. But it doesn't matter about the photography, the music and everything else if the script is right, the emotion carries through. It's all become so over-technical now.

Your films do seem to have a definite theatrical orientation and most of them have been based on plays. Yet they are very energetic in film terms.

Even with something like *The Glass Menagerie*, with its remarkable construction, it's still a kind of map. I think that you can break out of the proscenium arches even with *Menagerie* or *Dutchman*, because if you put the camera right in the middle of a subway train, then the proscenium arch has vanished. It's rhythms, really. If you can establish a tremendous rhythm from the beginning, an audience forgets where the camera or the proscenium arch or anything else is, and then you can break all those rules. Kubrick always used to say this, that if you can get a sort of pulse going in a film, that's half the battle. But *Eagle's Wing* was different, because from day to day I discovered things that never existed in the script.

*Eagle's Wing* does seem very different from your other films in that it neither has very much dialogue nor strongly developed characters at the script level.

The whole project attracted me as a chance to break away from the subjects I had done before, really to have complete freedom. It was a film with a very thin script in a way, yet it had a very strong story. It didn't have much detail and no dialogue at all, except for the first ten minutes, between Harvey Keitel and Martin Sheen. It was very much a director's subject. The moment I read *Eagle's Wing* I knew very clearly the kind of things I wanted visually, and talked to Billy Williams for days about it. Long before we shot, we wandered around places an hour away, and I said no, that's no good, we'll go three hours away, because there was some place that *did* look



like the surface of the moon, that had an abstract quality about it. We always got up at four in the morning to get to the location when the light came up. Then we'd stop during the day and start shooting again at five. In Mexico at that time of year you had a magic time that went from five till nine when everything was in a half-light.

We shot it in nine weeks, which was short, but we had the wonderful luxury of a small unit, of being able to go out and just wait for that light. With the most brilliant directors, I've never quite believed in the Indian myth, and I thought that these Indians must have a sort of mystical, mysterious quality about them. I thought how fascinating it would be if one could show them in a kind of half-light, so that you never quite see them.

**Did you have a precise image in mind of the scene where Claudio Brook and the posse find Stéphane Audran and her maids, which opens with a back view of her in white under a parasol between the two maids in black, very stylised, almost suggesting Victorian ladies at a picnic?**

Billy Williams didn't like that location, he thought it was wrong. But it worked, I think, it just seemed so strange because of the enormous expanse and the lady with the parasol. All I had planned in my head was putting a very civilised situation in these desperate surroundings and brilliant light and then seeing what I could do with it. I'd put the camera facing the three women, then when I wandered round I felt it was striking seeing the backs of these people, and that it was a wonderful way to start the scene. I did have a very clear image of how the overall thing would look, but you can't actually plan on a location as you might in a studio because the light changes all the time. Of course, in the cutting room you could have started the scene any way, with the arrival of the posse or whatever. But it just seemed interesting to have that very stylised image. Originally, I thought that Stéphane Audran was the character who should have been kidnapped, because she's such a fine actress and because it would have been fascinating to see all that sophistication stripped away. You could have gone a great deal further.

We never finished a scene as one normally does on a film. We'd always come back to the same scenes, not to re-shoot but to add to them, so that it was like building bricks. We wanted to get that light, and it was so hard for Billy Williams to match everything that we did little pieces of each scene over a period of a week.

**Given that technique, the editing patterns were presumably very important. Yet we understand the film has subsequently been altered.**

The money people came in and, when I was in Hollywood, made a number of cuts and put back some things that I had taken out. They weren't enormously serious, they're purely editing things, yet they were serious to me because you spend hours in the cutting rooms establishing rhythms on a film.

There's a shot of a girl with a rose, in the hacienda scene, which was very close to me. She sees her lover getting up on a horse, and it was set up so that she runs in, then cut to the boy, cut back to the girl—who was a beautiful Mexican creature of about sixteen—back to the boy closer, then back to her and she runs off. That was all taken out except one shot, and then a final one when she runs with the rose to stand beside John Castle. It was rather moving and lyrical, now it's choppy and you're not quite sure where she comes from. It takes a long time to get these balances, and if they are pulled away... When I heard about this and protested, I was told that all they wanted to do was shorten the film.

There's a scene where Sam Waterston comes back having finally got the horse. The girl (Caroline Langrishe) is sitting there and he shoots his gun off and jumps up with her on the horse. It's the first time he actually smiles and she does too. It had some humour, and my God the film needs humour. They cut that down to one shot, so that again it isn't set up. They seem to think that taking out things like that makes a film move. But it doesn't. The thing that makes a film move is to take out a whole sequence. I think cutting to the bone is most important, and the film to me could still do with twenty minutes out of

it. If anything is overlong it's the first section, because you have to establish Martin Sheen's character. But just to pick little cuts, in order to try to speed it up, and then put back things that slow it down... It's illogical and not terribly intelligent. This was done by the executive producer, Peter Shaw, who had done one film, *The Water Babies*.

**What sort of things have been put back?**

There's one shot of Martin Sheen on his horse singing 'D'ye ken John Peel' that looks just like an out-take. There was no composition at all, and there it is stuck in the middle of a film which is very carefully worked out. I had cut the whole of it because it was boring—and Martin had lost his voice that day! And when the coach appears, they put in a shot of Sam Waterston waiting, which was taken from some other sequence. So you know damn well there's going to be an ambush. In my version, the coach went across so that when the first arrow came it was a total surprise.

I would like to have taken out all the dialogue at the end too. I always felt it should be a silent picture. I cut out the line 'A boozy Indian', which I found didn't work, but there it is, back in again. There's also a lousy moment when the girl appeals to her brother as Waterston is dragging her off, 'Help me, help me', which has been put back.

**Would your original cut, then, have been shorter than Rank's?**

Much. The girl with the rose scene has lost about thirty seconds of film. But there's about two minutes of 'D'ye ken John Peel' and there's a scene with Sam Waterston getting drunk on top of the coach, which is two or three minutes and which I had cut because it was boring. Also a long scene with Caroline Langrishe reciting 'Hail Mary'. Completely unnecessary.

When we ran the first cut, about four hours, Rank were very excited, and they were horrified whenever I cut anything out! They kept saying, 'Where's that marvellous sequence...?' I suppose that's why the Indian getting drunk has gone back, because they thought I was cheating them. I shot a love scene between Sam Waterston and the girl. I had three cameras and shot it in a dust storm, and it seemed to be very erotic and extraordinary. But I looked at it in the rushes and thought it couldn't be less erotic, so I cut it completely. Also there was no time to have a love scene in a film which is a chase. Well, the first reaction was, God, in this film we need some sex. But it isn't that kind of film. Still, that scene is as I wanted it to be.

**You had similar problems, of course, on *They Might Be Giants*.**

That film was destroyed; *Eagle's Wing* isn't because the film still has the essence of what one intended. But on *They Might Be Giants* they took out all the action, the movement of the film, so that it ended up as a duologue between Joanne Woodward and George C. Scott. It became a sort of middle-aged love story, so that all the excitement and madness was lost. They paid 400,000 dollars for the property, for Joanne Woodward, but they didn't understand it. I remember having conversations in Hollywood, and they didn't know what Moriarty meant at all. I ended up in Canada reconstituting every frame, and thought what a relief. Then two months later

'They Might Be Giants': George C. Scott and Joanne Woodward in the supermarket sequence





Universal sent a memo to my agent saying, 'We want no further dialogue with Mr. Harvey as our sales department thinks that this version works.'

There was a whole twenty minutes of a supermarket breaking up. There's nothing more glorious for a director than to break up an enormous American supermarket. It was real Mack Sennett stuff which turned progressively blacker and blacker. There's a great sequence with George Scott, who thinks he's being pursued by Moriarty, running down Wall Street. We spent days shooting that and it just vanished, with no explanation at all. People seem to like the film, but it isn't the film I made and spent a year and a half of agony on.

**Was the narration at the beginning of *Eagle's Wing* also imposed on you?**

I fought hard not to have that, because I don't think it makes any sense. If you don't get the film, it doesn't make it any clearer. I also didn't like the way it was delivered. Martin Sheen did it months later while he was making a television special on John Dean. On the very last day of shooting, I rushed off to get it from him. But it sounds so heavy. It would probably have been much better as a title. It's been a year and a half since this film was finished, and they were worried about it. They were going to chop it into bits and have a commentary over the whole thing. This fragment remained of that.

**You said that you thought the beginning was too slow. This is also the only section of the film which has much dialogue or conventional exposition.**

If I could go back, I'd be ruthless, because you could still get across Sheen's character without going on quite so much about it. But I also deliberately held back at the beginning of the film. I purposely made it slow and rather pretty, with almost pedestrian relationships. I think the film depends enormously on twists and turns and the unexpected image. Progressively they get into lighter and lighter territory, the film becomes more pastoral and lyrical in its colours, so that when the Indian attack comes you hope it is the last thing the audience expects.

**What was the particular quality of the relationship you wanted between Sheen and Keitel? It seems as if you are slightly guying the Keitel character, with this urban actor coming on like Daniel Boone. When he is killed and the film goes on, you realise that it was an irony, that he was just one step ahead of Martin Sheen in Western lore.**

That was exactly what one wanted to get across. A rather smug attitude. I'd envisaged that character as a much older man, much more a real Western cowboy, but rather wasted looking. But Rank wanted Keitel for the box-office, and when he came to do it I was surprised and very pleased. He is a very urban kind of actor, very New York, and in that period those characters were all over the West. The Martin Sheen character went along with him. He's a romantic and an idiot and a sort of mock-heroic figure. He mentions having been an actor at one point, so there's all that terrible false bravado when he brings out the sword to try to rescue Keitel. But because of this quality of obsession, the characters—certainly the Sheen character—go on and on without any real instinct of self-



*'Eagle's Wing': the widow (Stéphane Audran) and her maids awaiting rescue after the stagecoach ambush*

preservation. As one often does, I think, when making a film. I've just spent a year on a thing which has driven me absolutely mad, because I could never really make it work. And I think one becomes obsessed. I never can leave the editing room until midnight, and your health goes and you never eat any meals. I remember this long ago with Stanley Kubrick: if you're mad about what you're doing, there's nothing that can get in the way. It's the same thing with the Sheen character; it's completely unrealistic.

Apart from being the story of an obsession, I think the film is also the story of an impossible dream. Finally the Sheen character realises it's nothing at all; it's just thin air. One chases after things that really don't exist. I think people get through life simply by having wonderful dreams—otherwise it would be very hard. Hope in life, whether it's a love affair or anything else, is based on a kind of fantasy. The Sheen character saw this horse and became obsessed by it, and in the end everything turned to dust.

**Are you conscious of this as a recurring theme? It does seem to come back in your best films, *Dutchman*, *They Might Be Giants*, and this one.**

And *The Glass Menagerie* more than anything: they were all people in search of something that didn't really exist. I'm a very romantic character, and I think my films are. I thought the important thing with *Eagle's Wing* was to make it both romantic and tough, because you can be over-romantic to the point where it becomes idiotic. I admire David Lean a great deal. If anyone could have influenced me in this country it's David Lean, because his films have an enormous romanticism about them, almost idealistically so. *Ryan's Daughter* is brilliant; not many people liked it, but I thought the opening passages were absolutely stunning.

**Were you consciously playing *Eagle's Wing* off against any other Westerns? Peckinpah, perhaps, in the hacienda scene?**

No. Except in the stagecoach section, I suppose one thinks of John Ford, because that is such a classic thing, all those people in that coach. I just hoped that I could make it an original, because it's an odd thing for an English director to be doing in the first place, and to be making it in Mexico with an English crew. I spent a lot of time in the Indian museum in New York, which is one of the singularly most exciting places. We took every detail from there, and it was important to get the film wholly authentic. Phyllis Dalton, who worked on *Zhivago* and *Lawrence of Arabia*, did a brilliant job with the clothes, because we wanted them to look desperate. For the make-up, I mixed clay with greasepaint, and we spent some time testing that to see if we could really get a primitive feeling. You should almost be able to smell the Waterston character.

**The music often seems to play on traditional Western qualities for humorous or ironic effect, as in the scene where Martin Sheen tames the horse, or at the end, when the monumental, heroic strain of the music is overtaken by the sound of the wind.**

In a film like that there's nothing more extraordinary than just having wind and birds and natural sounds. The moment you put music in, however skilful it is, it becomes a cliché. Particularly anything to do with Indians. Because there's so little dialogue, the film is almost a great chance for a composer. But it has to be absolutely true American primitive, just like a wonderful sound effect. I was very concerned about the music, because when I left to do *Players* there was a totally different score with an enormous orchestra. A lot of it was cut and we re-orchestrated on a tiny scale, and when I saw the film the other day I thought the music was pretty good. We had the chance of getting Aaron Copland, which would almost have been like having another star in the film. Rank just weren't interested, but I used Copland and Holst in the cutting copy.



### Was *Eagle's Wing* an original screenplay?

Michael Syson, who was with the BBC, wrote it as a kind of short story, a series of ideas with a very strong story-line but not really a script. I then sat down with the writer Jack Briley for about a month before we went on location, just to make logic of it. We wrote in dialogue, most of which I cut, not because of the quality of what he wrote but because in the end it seemed to be a film that worked wonderfully with silences. You should have the tension of confrontation between the Indian and Martin Sheen without anything really being said: a confrontation of faces. I thought the film would happen in long passages with every now and then these moments of violence—but violence without blood, I must add, because if you leave it to the audience's imagination it's always much stronger. The only explicit moment is when the arrow goes into Sheen, and I tried to cut round that scene as much as possible. He took his boot off and poured the blood out, which I cut. It's much better if you see it in somebody's face, whether it's death or...

**The landscape at the end, when Sam Waterston finally disappears in the distance, seems to be the same as at the beginning, suggesting that these obsessions are circular or never-ending.**

It's like with *Dutchman*, I love to start and end with the same image. I wanted Waterston to become almost abstract and like a cloud of dust. Sheen thought he had something in his hands and when he grasped at it, there was nothing there at all.

**And the opening shot of the film is a complete circular pan?**

Yes. We went up that hill the Sunday before we started shooting the film and just waited for that light. You could turn a camera 360 degrees and not see a single sign of humanity. That's how fascinating and beautiful, primitive and stunning that land is. Mexico is a wonderful place to make films, because they're all crazy about film-making. They're natural actors, you can just take somebody off the street and photograph him. They have an innocence about them and also a great humour. But that very black humour which Malcolm Lowry wrote about in *Under the Volcano*, which captured more than any other book about Mexico.

But the elements there were terrifying. There was a wind storm that lasted for about three weeks, and I don't know how the actors did it. Martin Sheen, who had never ridden a horse in his life, went off to learn in two weeks and it looks to me as though he was part of that horse. But Sam Waterston, who's rather New York and a brilliant fellow, found it agony. He fell off all the time, he fractured his arm and he was always straining and bruising things. By the end he was a total wreck. He's a terrific actor.

**You worked with him on *The Glass Menagerie*?**

He played the son, Tom. It's very strange about that film: it opened at the London Film Festival, got probably the best reviews I've ever had, and has never been seen again in Britain. It was made as a film, but David Susskind sold it to television. If it opened here, he'd have to pay everybody, so we all wrote to him and said we don't want any salary, just show the damn thing. Even

Tennessee Williams said I'll waive anything, please show it. And he still won't, because apparently to hire something like the Curzon cinema and to put it on costs money. It's something I feel very proud of and it has never been shown again: got a fine press and cost absolutely nothing to make.

**You made something else that was shown on television?**

A huge scale thing, about Aimée Semple Macpherson, with Faye Dunaway and Bette Davis, which was made in ten days in Denver, Colorado. I always shoot everything as a film; I can never think of anything in terms of television. Faye Dunaway was marvellous, mysterious and strange, and the twists and turns of Aimée's life make a fascinating story. She was a total fraud, in a way, but had an hypnotic quality, and in that period in California—as now, I think—people needed to believe in something.

**Somebody has said that *Players* was your revenge for not making *Love Story*.**

I didn't do *Love Story* because for about three weeks I sat in Green Park with Erich Segal, looked at the script, said I can't do this, he won't change any of the lines, and rang up and got out of it. Then, ten years later, I'm in Mexico doing *Eagle's Wing* and Bob Evans calls and says, come on, we're going to start over again. In a way, it was the same problem: no script. And the script seems to be more of an agony now to find.

**Was the film done in such a complicated flashback way to get round the problem of the script?**

It was indeed. We tried to write as we went along. Writers came down, and it's fatal because you're trying to concentrate on shooting at the same time. So you're never quite sure what day you're doing what; there's no point of view. The only thing that I feel comes off is the tennis.

**That was shot at Wimbledon last year?**

We got the crowd in there, put some matches on with Pancho Gonzalez and a few other players so they wouldn't feel bored, and to their credit they sat there, in broiling sun, all day long. I'd say sixty per cent of the picture must be tennis, which was literally two days shooting. I spent a day on the Centre Court with Vilas, and just simply went through each point, and then if it didn't work we'd go back. I had seven cameras, and when I got back to Hollywood I found I still didn't have enough footage, so I had to double up on dups.

I have never spent so much time putting anything together, because although tennis is very balletic, it's the most difficult thing in the world to cut. You almost have to make the rhythm up and you also have to make a game that makes sense. That tennis match is certainly total editing. I had one day to shoot that whole match, plus about half a day on the last day of Wimbledon to do the entrance at the very beginning of the film, which was just before the Borg-Connors match, with the real Centre Court people.

**The sad thing about *Players* is that it's beautifully put together, directed and edited, and it's just not very interesting. Yet there is an interesting script there if someone had written it...**

About hustling. She living off an older

man and the boy living off her. So that each of them is doing the same thing without really knowing it. That's what we tried to get. We didn't have a happy ending at the start. I wanted him to win the game and lose the girl. But Vilas, being the tennis player that he is, wouldn't have that in his contract. So Dean-Paul Martin couldn't really lose the game and the girl. I don't think an audience could accept that. I wanted to put a title on the very end: They lived happily ever after for a week. But they didn't like that.

**You've been working on an adaptation of *Under the Volcano*?**

I worked with Jorge Semprun a long time ago in Paris, when the Hakims owned it. He used exciting elements such as the spy story and the chase so that it isn't just those three characters stuck in this terrible void. He wrote a wonderful treatment, but when it came to the point of delivering it, the Hakims didn't have the finance. Then, while I was doing *Players*, Bob Evans became interested because Faye Dunaway had always wanted to do it. The Mexicans had by this time taken it over from the Hakims, and Jorge Semprun came back into it, but he never actually sent the pages. I think he wanted to get back some dollars before parting with his pages; they thought if we could see the pages first, and if we like it...

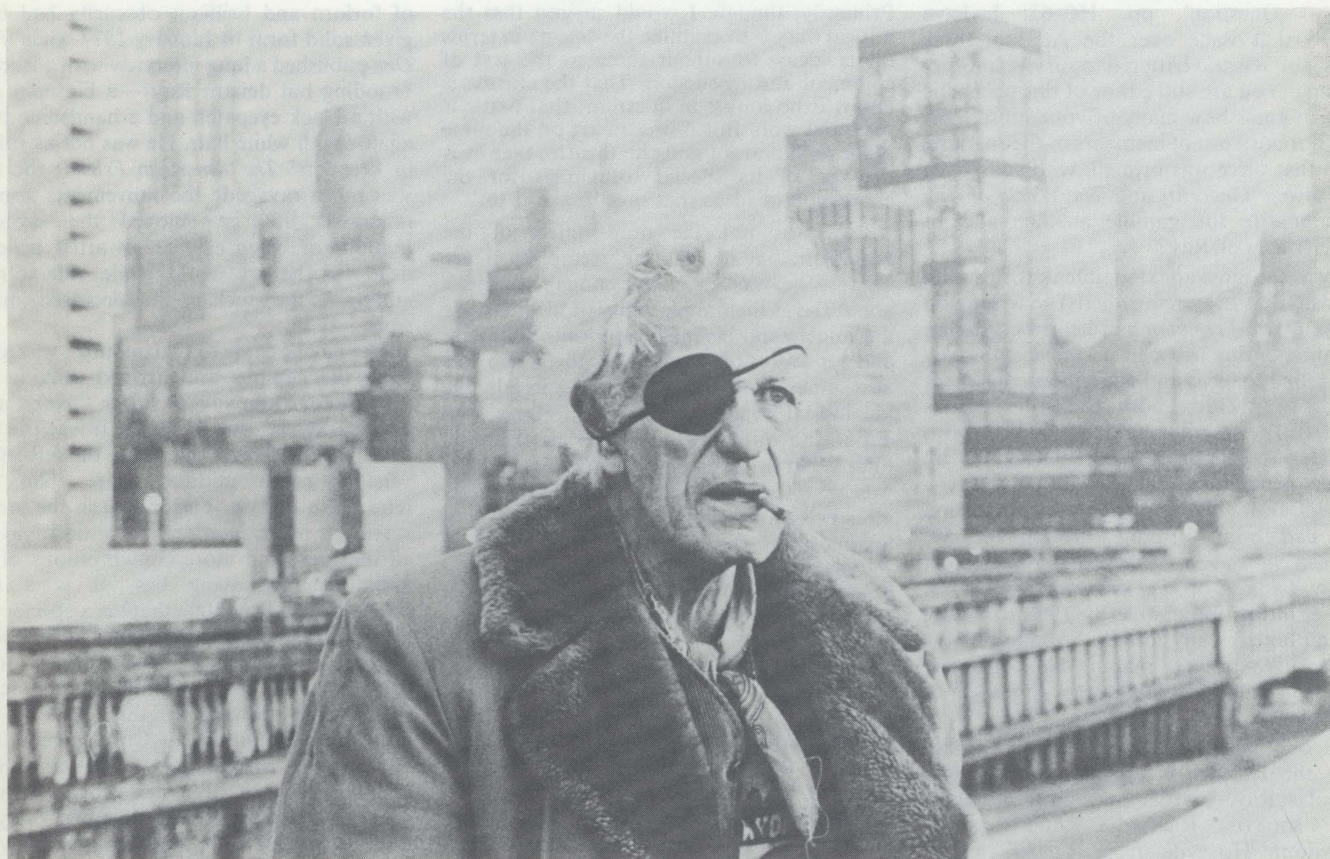
I've tried to sit down and write a script for *Under the Volcano*. It's the hardest thing in the world. It's such an introverted novel, in the same way as *Out of Africa*, which is also something I worked on for some time. That was given to me years ago by Robert Ardrey, who wrote a screenplay for Maggie Smith. But that didn't work. Then I think Nic Roeg worked on it, but nobody's been able to get a screenplay. It's very difficult again because it's about a woman who is in love with a country. I think you could do it wonderfully as a documentary, with a voice-over. The last script concocted a tremendous love affair between the Baroness Blixen and Denys Finch-Hatton, with erotic love scenes which just didn't work. First of all, they never happened. There's so much documentation on that, including a book from his point of view written by a woman who knew them. It was purely a platonic friendship. Every script that I've seen has always tried to make much more of it, and you can't do that if you're going to be true to it.

I'm happy to say that I'm going to get back into a very tiny film, shoot it in three weeks, with Katharine Hepburn and Jack Lemmon. It's *The Gin Game*, a play about two people in an old folk's home who play gin rummy. It's a tiny, minute piece: minutiae, of course, have always fascinated me in people and films. There are long silences and a wonderful relationship between these two people. At the moment we haven't quite got the property, and in fact the writer, D. L. Coburn, has said he doesn't think it's a film, so he doesn't want to part with it. I think that's rather marvellous—I've never heard of that! Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy are superb in it, so he perhaps has a moral obligation to them not to part with it. It's his first play, a distinguished piece: it was directed by Mike Nichols and won a Pulitzer prize. It's done very much for laughs, but I think it's a much more tragic piece than it seems. But Joe Levine is still trying to get it. It may come full circle...



# IN A LONELY PLACE

David Thomson



Nicholas Ray in 'The American Friend'

*'I believe that the camera used properly, and by that I mean the director putting it literally on his shoulder and hunting for the truth of a scene, or a reaction, an inner action, can photograph the thoughts and desires of an individual or a group.'*—

Nicholas Ray, *Movie*, May 1963.

In the summer of 1978 I submitted an article to this magazine. It did not turn out to be a coherent commentary on a major film, a worthy director, or a theme common to many movies. Looking back, I realise that it forsook the judicious shaping of evidence around some interpretative proposition that inspires most critical writing and all magazines that publish it. Far from serving to explain, this article was a troubled reaction to things beyond orderliness. It took the form of a helpless diary: thoughts and encounters from a year in America spent teaching film at Dartmouth and meeting filmmakers as I wrote a column for *The Real Paper* in Boston. It was not a cheerful piece—for either the role of a teacher/critic or the state of American film. I was dismayed by the wave of shallow energy in young directors, and by meeting Nicholas Ray, profound but devastated after surgery for cancer. It needed no prescience to suspect he might be dead in a year, but my sense of his mysteriously curtailed career darkened the writing.



If you are regular readers of *SIGHT AND SOUND* you will know that the article was not published. I have no complaints about that decision and only gratitude for this part of the refusal: 'It did seem to me a case of the form getting in the way of the content; and leaving one in some doubt about just what the content was. I showed it to a couple of people here, who both felt it suggested that you were fairly disillusioned at the moment with movies, or perhaps just with writing and teaching about movies, but weren't quite willing to make this the substance of the piece. So it tended to be a series of disenchanted asides... Maybe what you should have been writing about is poor Nick Ray.' Well, Nicholas Ray is dead now, and I will try again, feeling a duty towards him and you, Penelope.

I hope you are not disconcerted at being addressed personally. You are immediately covered by the propriety of a reference that deserves a footnote: *SIGHT AND SOUND*, autumn 1960, Penelope Houston, 'The Critical Question', pp. 160-65. I have carried that issue over the Atlantic three times, and it is too battered to survive another crossing. You are still editor of this magazine and can guess how many of your subscribers were not born or not members of the Institute when that piece was printed, with stills from *The Savage Innocents* and *The World of Apu* to dramatise the gamble at the gates of heaven: Ray or Ray?

It was the most agitated time in British film criticism that I can remember. The writing on film in *Oxford Opinion* had helped crystallise the antagonism between a cinema allegedly committed to ideas and one supposedly intent on form (in fact, both took the other's clothes). The Oxonian rivalry—for *SIGHT AND SOUND* was edited and characterised by an earlier generation from that university—seemed more relevant than the opposition that had been forming through the 50s between *SIGHT AND SOUND* and the virulent yellow banner of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Of course, it was impossible by 1960 to ignore French heresies any longer. So many of the *Cahiers* writers were making films that any magazine had to acknowledge with respect or excitement.

No one had earned more euphoric praise from the French or *Oxford Opinion* than Nicholas Ray. In that autumn 1960 *SIGHT AND SOUND*,<sup>\*</sup> Richard Roud quoted Fereydoun Hoveyda from *Cahiers* as an example of the French line, and the uninhibited ecstasy it sought: 'To remain insensitive to the thousand beauties of Nicholas Ray's *Party Girl* is to turn one's back resolutely on the modern cinema, to reject the cinema as an autonomous art.' And in May 1963, when the *Oxford Opinion* writers had moved on to become *Movie*, V. F. Perkins, writing more conventionally and didactically, denied the distinction between commercial and personal cinema and denounced attacks on Nick Ray's films because their subjects had been trite or defective:

'The treatment may or may not have been successful: there is no such thing as an unsuccessful subject. Ray has himself criticised the literary preoccupations of some screenwriters. "It was all in the script", a disillusioned writer will tell you. But it was never all in the script. If it were, why make the movie?' The disillusioned writer and the

insensitive critic are alike in discounting the very things for which one goes to the cinema: the extraordinary resonances which a director can provoke by his use of actors, decor, movement, colour, shape, of all that can be seen and heard.'

Surely that was aimed at *SIGHT AND SOUND*, a magazine that had said too little about *The Lusty Men*, *Bigger Than Life*, *Bitter Victory*, *Party Girl* or *Wind Across the Everglades*. Yet in that 1960 article, Penelope Houston had reminded anyone interested that it was her group of Oxford opinionists who helped get *They Live By Night* its London opening. She also spelled out what remains a large task for criticism and a vital challenge to movies:

'Any theory one can formulate is of general value only in so far as it illuminates the general problem. And the main duty of criticism at present, as I see it, has little to do with the argument about form versus content, aesthetic value versus values of a subject. If the film makes an impact it does so through its style, using style here to mean the full force of the artist's personality as revealed in his work: there can be no argument here. Primarily, though, I would suggest that the critical duty is to examine the cinema in terms of its ideas, to submit these to the test of comment and discussion. That the cinema is an art is no longer in question; that battle is over and won. But if it is an art on the same plane as literature and the theatre, then it is the use of its special techniques for the expression of ideas that must make it so.'

Ray was not the only object of the argument, but he was the exemplary figure because he was articulate enough to speak about the elemental plasticity of his films. He did understand his most rapturous admirers; and he was surely moved by them. He was also someone anxious for ideas, especially the ideological content in extreme feelings, and about the difficulty of delivering them on film. What no one knew during the early 60s was that Ray's career as a film-maker was already at an end; or that one morning in Spain, amid the troubles of *55 Days at Peking*, he woke up and said to his wife: 'Something has come to me in the night, and told me that if I do this film I will never make another.'



I understand that there was scarcely a mention of it in the British press. Even in *Variety*, far more space was given to the careers and deaths of David Butler and Herman Shumlin. But Nicholas Ray died in New York City on 16 June 1979. The threatening dream in Madrid was realised. He had not released a film in sixteen years, a span as great as his active period in the industry, 1947-63. Just as he became the centre of a cult in English-speaking countries, he had stopped working: in *In a Lonely Place*, too, the career breakthrough occurs when the life has already fallen apart.

Ray died in poverty, after a decline that dismayed and moved onlookers, but which never overpowered his unsparing humour and only strengthened his proud sense of being the figure in a tragedy. During his last year, he consented to the making of a film on his approach to death: it was the collaboration of Ray and Wim Wenders, a record, a tribute and a testament to friendship.\* He

\*Unfinished at his death, there should be enough to release.

was a piteous figure, if you only considered the impact of his cancer and its treatments. But he respected his own chances, determined to advance on whatever awaited him. After long silences, in which he seemed to go far away, he could speak with a lucidity and precision that for a moment inspired you with the hope that this man might work again.

I met Ray in July of 1978. At that time I had only a sketchy sense of his wandering frustrations since 1963, so much a fulfilment of the lifelong determination that he was a stranger. Even now, I wonder whether he or anyone else could have given a thorough account of those years, or say why there were no more films. There had been projects started but ruined, prolonged struggles with illness and alcoholism, years spent in Europe, and the time at Harpur College, in upstate New York, when Ray taught film-making and produced an anguished psycho-drama, *We Can't Go Home Again*, in which he appeared himself as a rogue director/teacher on the brink of suicide. It showed a man half in love with his own disaster. But the legend of forlorn and brilliant obscurity had been given solid form in January 1977 when *Take One* published a long interview with a laconic, brooding but defiant Ray†—a big man still, with a black eyepatch and a handsome head aflame with white hair. He was not as robust in Wenders' *The American Friend*: the face was more ravaged; the movements seemed muddled. But he enjoyed the sardonic humour of being cast as an artist believed dead by the art world while still secretly adding to the stock of the 'deceased' man's work.

The day he came to Dartmouth I was away from the campus and arrived only in the evening for a showing of *Bitter Victory*, after which Ray was due to speak. It was the first time that I had been able to see the full-length version: seven minutes more than was released in Britain. The ending in the proper version is more agonised, more dismissive of all illusions, and more contemptuous of the military's face-saving lies. It is a very characteristic Ray film: there is a spectacular lyric pain in sustained passages; it is always suggestive of uglier or lovelier things unsaid or unshown; like lightning in its action scenes; but flawed—in this case by the intractable limitations of Curt Jurgens (Ray had wanted Montgomery Clift) and Ruth Roman. Like all Ray's best work, the more overt the action becomes the more surely we discover depth in characters who have a greater doubt and self-awareness than is common in American pictures. Time and again, over fifteen years, he made insecurity the focus in people, rejecting Hollywood's industrial confidence and vigour.

The just war against the Germans in North Africa in *Bitter Victory* takes second place to the temperamental hostility of fellow-officers—it is a study in grace and shabbiness (like *The Savage Innocents*)—and to Richard Burton's wintry refusal to regard life as more than a trap or an anachronism. It is a CinemaScope picture of unfailing visual crisis. The close-ups on the stretched screen are among the most sombre images of exposed loneliness ever filmed. In one sequence, Burton has to shoot a wounded soldier and then labours to carry another on

†Though that interview had been conducted in 1974.





his back, only to find the burden has died too, after dreadful agony: 'I kill the living and save the dead.' It is one of Ray's grimmest jokes, resigned, mirthless and apocalyptic.

When the lights came up after the picture, I expected the rugged outcast, slouching wickedly or still as poised as Johnny Guitar. No such outlaw came forward. As I looked around, I noticed and discounted a very thin, frail man proceeding down the aisle helped by a younger woman. He looked eighty as my eye flicked over him. He looked like Max Schreck's vampire in Murnau's *Nosferatu*, too, for he was utterly bald and the head was a glaring, eerie dome. It was Nicholas Ray, and it took him several minutes to make his way to the stage. He was barely out of hospital after several operations. He gave cryptic answers to polite questions, after immense hesitation and effort. There was no hint of indifference to the audience. It was just that the ordeal of speaking and reflecting was a great demand on his attenuated constitution.

Talking to Ray that night, the next day, and then in August at his birthday party, attended by a flock of people half his age, didn't make the lost years more understandable. All I can say is that after *55 Days at Peking*, he fell away from Hollywood, at first with the exhilaration of feeling free from conglomerate dishonesty and trivial ideas, but then intrigued by the chance that he was only falling. He had felt cheated on his last film, and had resolved to make no more compromises: it was his most romantic and self-destructive moment, however much illness may have made some rest necessary. There was a side to him that plunged into chaos and danger with a will: it had always been there in his films, the urge towards risk and violence, a chicken run to settle all doubts. He had never been a maker of comfortable endings. Even in Hollywood, his work was filled with Yeatsian centres that came apart like glass balls on a Christmas tree. He did his greatest work in the 50s, amid a grisly national cheerfulness meekly reproduced in most films. But he insisted on an America cracking from stress, with strung-out heroes and contradictory ideals. He was the first man to film what we now regard as the convulsions of the 60s.

I will not bother to prove or describe the beauty of his films: Monsieur Hoveyda said it all, as gallantly as anyone could say it, if they found it necessary to do more than sit in front of the pictures. But let me say a few things about the ideas in Ray's films. Without some feeling for them, the beauty will never matter; but once affected by the ideas, one hardly has the time or calm to measure aesthetic splendour. Beauty in Ray is always a sign of disruption.

Above all, he shrugged off the restrictive hold of genres: *Hot Blood*, *The Savage Innocents*, *Johnny Guitar* and *Wind Across the Everglades* are unclassifiable films, head-strong mixtures of existentialism, melodrama and anthropology. Films more easily labelled still exceed the regular fashions that Hollywood permitted. Invariably, Ray dodged the happy closure and brought his

*Images of anxiety: 'Bigger Than Life' (James Mason); 'In a Lonely Place' (Gloria Grahame and Humphrey Bogart); 'Bitter Victory'*



overwrought situations towards tragic ends. *They Live by Night*, *In a Lonely Place*, *The Lusty Men*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Bigger Than Life* and *Bitter Victory* end without consolation or further hope for positive energy. They have seen noble people and causes dragged down and spoiled—*Party Girl* seems to me that much less memorable because the two uneasy leads are left with one another and the implausible dead-end of a happy future. Exhilaration in Ray's work is intense but mortal: the epiphanies are as precarious as Dean and Natalie Wood playing home in *Rebel*, that last rolling plate in *Peking*, or sunlight on the Everglades. Just as often, the heightened moments are mordant and alienated: there is not a love story in Ray's work that lasts a reel without paranoia or accident twisting it.

Ray often argued against this bleak attitude, trying to find optimism in his own films, claiming that the outcast has no right to blame society or indulge in self-pity. But Dean's terrible cry, and the camera's accompanying swoon, that Plato's gun had no bullets, cancels out hope. So few American directors have been able to convey deep distress with America; fewer still have ever felt the need to try it. It is Ray's greatest idea that he could never escape the need, never feel relaxed. *Rebel* and *Bigger Than Life* are descriptions of universal family crack-up—the models being so ordinary and suburban\*—in which neurosis is accelerated by dull, daily pressures. Dean and James Mason are stricken poets, cultivated, sensitive, altruistic, but without the means of expression, without the respect of their society, driving towards some dead end. Their movies depict romantic humanism going mad in a plastic cage. There is so much facile sensationalism and engineered shock in American films, but so few that look beneath their own malicious self-satisfaction. *The Godfather* is the numb victim of its own diagnosis. But *Rebel* and *Bigger Than Life* are cries of social agony, with heroes on the threshold of a delirious and fatal vision of energy as their last right.

Ray's energy on screen always lunges outwards: that is why his CinemaScope images were so dynamic, yet so wounded and questioning. He never trimmed that energy down to, say, the macabre passivity of Al Pacino in *The Godfather*. His characters cry out, they strive and yearn to be lively. Yet the energy was always ambiguous, as witness *In a Lonely Place*, the most personal of Ray's films and one that looks more austere as years pass, and less and less like a Hollywood picture.

It concerns a screenwriter, Dixon Steele (Humphrey Bogart), and his love affair with Laurel Gray (Gloria Grahame). They live in the same apartment building, and Ray's use of the courtyard, the rooms and the stairways as a grid on which the lovers fail one another is more tragically felt than any of Fritz Lang's geometric enclosures. The affair is blighted by Steele's pathological temper—part talent, part depression and part a wilful intransigence. He despises most of his Hollywood work, and the self-hatred sometimes lashes out at others. Steele is a baleful hero regarded

with caution and sadness by the film itself: it is every bit as desperate a family picture as *Pierrot le Fou* was for Godard and Karina. Ray and Grahame were married too, and at the end of the picture Laurel retreats from Steele because of his inaccessible tension. Steele is cleared of a murder suspicion, but in the process Laurel has come to dread the murderous impulse in his thwarted idealism.

You can feel the confessional melancholy all through *In a Lonely Place*. Gloria Grahame was Ray's second wife and they were divorced soon after the film. That is not remarkable in the context of Hollywood's shifting emotional paths. *In a Lonely Place* shows the threats that haunted egotism and creative insecurity present to relationships. What is more unusual is that Gloria Grahame went on to marry Tony Ray, Nick's son by his first marriage, and now Paul Mazursky's producer. There were more children by a third marriage, of whom he saw very little after that divorce. Ray had a gloomy, romantic sense of the displacement of people and the solitude that awaited maturity. But his rebels never lacked a cause: Dean in *Rebel* is the inarticulate prophet of domestic disquiet. He sings Wagner and contemplates the ominous depth of space. His cause is as lofty and sweeping as Ray's—'a heightened sense of being'. The most obstinate idea in Ray's life is that the cause turned out to be self-destruction. Yet, if not that, you may only consign the burden to another.



The pressing reasons for Ray's long silence may be personal and neurotic; I hope one day that a searching biography will do something to tell that story. It might read like the

archetypal Ray plot, but it would dispel his own foolish dream: 'Die young and leave a good-looking corpse.' Like most people, he managed neither. But I can think of one very practical reason for his withdrawal. Ray stopped directing at a terrible time for the industry—bad box-office, alarm in investors and mounting anxiety about risky, enterprising projects. It is sometimes said that Hollywood was 'breaking down': *Cleopatra* had offended nearly everyone with extravagance, the studio system was shrinking, TV was absorbing the slack tide of audience, there was no longer a reliable formula for making movies, no more long-term contracts, no standing army of studio craftsmen. Samuel Bronston, the mogul who soured Ray, was an inexperienced producer who seized the chance of idle funds in Spain. He was not Hollywood, and Ray ran into ever greater troubles the longer he stayed away from the studio system that produced his best pictures but which had come to represent the death of creativity in his eyes.

Like so many ambitious directors, Ray had reason to complain about studio working conditions. It is the classic anti-Thalberg attitude: that once the system got organised, films got safer and duller. Yet Ray's American producers include John Houseman, Robert Lord, Humphrey Bogart, Jerry Wald, Norman Krasna, David Weisbart, James Mason and himself. Not a band of mercenaries. Nor were the studio facilities—budget and schedule included—necessarily a handicap. They offered a structure for making films regularly, professional, conventional for the most part, but generally maligned by the 'producers-are-scoundrels' syndrome. One has to admit that, in the 60s, as studio support vanished and the

Nicholas Ray during the shooting of 'We Can't Go Home Again'



\**The Lusty Men* has a rodeo setting, bulls, broncos and cowboy hats, but it is another study of the middle class, of the need to be settled and stable, and the destructive role of the wanderer.



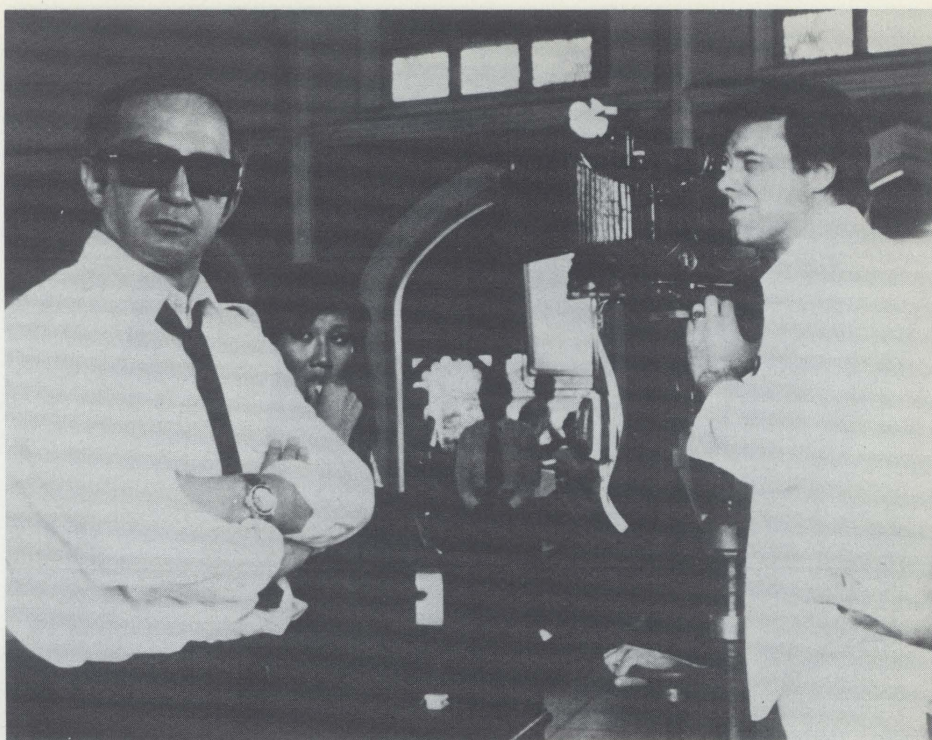
producers retired or died, so several leading directors of the 40s and 50s floundered: Ray for one, but Fuller, Sirk, Minnelli, Wilder and Vidor, too.

The fact of movie life in the 70s has been that every project is a one-off, and any concerned director has to fill the role of producer himself, has to find the money and worry about the overall package of a picture as well as the way to film tomorrow's set-up and get something extraordinary out of an actor. Francis Coppola and *Apocalypse Now* may be the most dramatic proof of that new privilege, but it affects his whole generation and may help explain the sudden relapse of Ray's.

Hollywood is still there, and no one could call the house haunted when Beverly Hills real estate is so supercharged a trade. The studios remain as sources of finance, office space for pre- and post-production and as distributors. There is a new generation in power, startlingly young, full of lawyers, agents and accountants, not often trained in movies, not as knowledgeable or as much in love with the trashy medium as, say, Selznick, Arthur Freed, Zanuck or Harry Cohn. They negotiate the deals and they preside over accounting procedures that leave many film-makers sure they are being methodically cheated. But those grievances nearly always stay silent—evidence of the surviving authority of the system. Ray called Hollywood book-keeping 'the most sophisticated form of stealing in the world'. The great stress today on money 'up-front' (which adds to the cost of the film-making) is the wisdom of knowing it often disappears later, or never manages to overtake a mythically unreachable 'break-even' point.\*

The success of young directors has encouraged the hope of their independence, but genuine independence is no more common than it ever was. The famous carte blanche that gave us *Citizen Kane* was rigorously circumscribed. Selznick allowed himself far more freedom on *Gone With the Wind*: creative liberty in America is always the province of the boss. The nearest example in recent years is Frank Gilroy's *Once in Paris*, a forlornly old-fashioned romance made on a unique co-operative, profit-sharing basis. This allowed Gilroy to make it as he wished, but it left the picture without the creative challenge of compromise. Gilroy opened it personally in New York and Los Angeles, hiring the theatres on a 'four-wall' basis. Only belatedly did he turn the picture over to a small distribution company. Virtually no one has seen it: the industry noticed oddity, but no threat. Thus Gilroy's belief that the system doesn't know how to market small, off-beat pictures is vindicated.

Further illustration of that is the way Peter Bogdanovich's new picture, *Saint Jack*, has fared. After three flops in a row, Bogdanovich had to go back to Roger Corman for his financing. Made on the run in Singapore, *Saint Jack* is not a major picture; but it's a personal revival for the director, as interested in unusual characters, local atmosphere and the subduing of melodrama by incident as was *The Last Picture Show*. Yet this summer the picture couldn't find a Los



Peter Bogdanovich lines up a close-up of Ben Gazzara in 'Saint Jack'

Angeles theatre to play in. They were all locked into deals desperate for the one or two big summer pictures, the 79 models of *Jaws*, *Star Wars* and *Grease*.

Those entertainments swept previous summers, and became three of the highest grossing films of all time—which in Hollywood still means automatically the best films ever made. In 1978, the American box-office grossed nearly \$2.75 billion, an all-time record. Of course, compared with the 20s, only about a sixth the number of films were made and the size of the audience was similarly reduced. The boom is as real as a swelling balloon, and just as vulnerable. Most films now lose money, so a few have to gross huge amounts. The ruthless pursuit of sequels, and the bureaucratic numbering of them, shows how close the movies have come to automobile production. One year of failure could send many people running into real estate or music—the business that has been steadily taking over Hollywood.

There is a movie audience, and its teenage inflection is stronger still in summer. No film now can conscientiously aim at less than the grand-slam impact of a *Jaws* (thus real problems yield to allegorical ordeals). Everyone wants to be in on one of those rubber monsters, and every film is priced up with special effects, the few stars available and on-screen sensation, and watered down in characterisation, narrative construction or audience involvement. The young audience knows now that it is meant to identify with the movie, not the people or situations in it. More and more shows are light-and-music trips for kids: a kind of environmental disco illusion, of which *Saturday Night Fever* and *Star Wars* are the prime examples.

*Jaws* is a compulsive ordeal. *Saturday Night Fever* is a massage. *Star Wars* is too whimsical to scold, and *Grease* makes fun of everything in a way that disarmed grave inspection. But this summer no such charmer has emerged. *Rocky II*, *Alien* and maybe *Dracula* will make money, but no one can

forget their meek copying or the merciless investment in visceral shock. There's not one difficult picture in sight, not one in which ideas feature let alone prod the sun-dazed audience. For a simple reason: they are not being made. How could they be when it is easier to set up a \$10 million shot at the big gross than a low-budget, out-of-the-ordinary venture? Directors whose nature is to try that can still be fired. This spring, Bob Rafelson was jerked off *Brubaker* by Fox because he was allegedly behind schedule. For one of America's few personal film-makers this was a salutary moment. *Brubaker* would have been his first studio picture. The happy inventive days of BBS seem to be over. Rafelson was unable to set up *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* on terms that were acceptable to his vision (the budget required a star he didn't believe in); *Brubaker* was a means of keeping in work, as well as a chance to deal with the nature of prison communities—it is based on the 60s Arkansas state prison scandal where a new warden found bodies buried all over the compound. Rafelson swung quickly from this rebuff to an announced re-make of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* with Jack Nicholson: a mouth-watering reunion, but a new idea?

It bespeaks Hollywood caution that the 'newest' idea is Vietnam. *Coming Home* and *The Deer Hunter* have won praise, prizes and modest grosses, without attempting to explore Norman Mailer's twelve-year-old question 'Why are we in Vietnam?'—something that still haunts America and has to be answered before anyone can deal with why or how to be in America. *Apocalypse Now* opens in August, with reserved seats and a \$5 ticket. Coppola has persuaded the culturally minded portion of the audience that to see it is the moral equivalent of a just war. Let us just hope that it is a good film and politely resist Coppola's pressuring that people serious about pictures have a duty to rally to his \$40 million rogue.

For the moment, I will abide by the evidence of earlier works: which is that

\*This is about three times the actual costs of a picture—as spelled out by Joan Didion in her excellent 1973 article, 'In Hollywood', *The White Album*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979).





'Fingers': Harvey Keitel

Coppola is a good story-teller with intellectual pretensions, a theatrical master who believes that he has dignified genre melodrama, but only shows how easily the dynamic of movies overwhelms half-baked ideas and discreet passions. It would be nice to think he went creatively crazy on *Apocalypse Now*, but I fear there is too much of Michael Corleone's pragmatism in Coppola. It may just be a film that got out of hand in a time when that small failure proves apocalyptic for him and half the film business.

Consider, in contrast, the case of James Toback. He wrote the screenplay for *The Gambler*, directed by Karel Reisz, and in 1978 he released his own first film, *Fingers* (cost \$1 million). I don't think it has ever opened in Britain—partly because it did badly here, though that has something to do with its poorly handled release. *Fingers* seems to me among the best American films of the 70s, and almost the only one that is made without respect for its audience's complacency and its financiers' comfort. It is a violently painful film, as great an intrusion as the opening of *Un Chien Andalou*, extremist at every stage and recklessly pledged to the belief that a film should wound and threaten with its intuitions of human nature, not just concoct scarey monsters and blood machines that do cute tricks if you buy a ticket.

It is akin to the trap in *The Gambler*, in which internal conflict leads a man into the jaws of life—which is only another playing of the chicken run. It is as if the two male figures in *Chien Andalou* were confined in one shell. The central character, magnificently played by Harvey Keitel, is an aspiring concert pianist and a debt collector for the mob. Toback allies these worlds with thrilling ease in depicting a man who is the vehicle of his own drives: self-expression, parental influence, fear, wonder... the heightened sense of being. *Fingers* is shocking because its central character is so alive, so committed to experience. And the juxtaposition of seeming opposites is as important an American idea as

you will find: Hollywood itself is a melting pot of gangsters, conmen, artists and those beasts who long for imaginative power over the minds of people. *Fingers* is a more radical and less depressed version of a theme touched on before in *The King of Marvin Gardens* and *In a Lonely Place*—that the American artist must be an outlaw.

Toback's current predicament is one of those Hollywood stories too rich for fiction. He wrote a script called *Love and Money* and sold it over dinner to Warren Beatty. Originally, Beatty was to play the lead part, but in the event he has used the very large profits from *Heaven Can Wait* (easily the most successful and least enterprising of his own productions) as a platform for his 'experimental' film about John Reed—Ten Reels to Shake Hollywood? It is a sweet giveaway of Hollywood schizophrenia that Beatty wants to play both John Reed and Howard Hughes. Do you remember the helplessly proud admission by the man himself that there were two Charles Foster Kanes?

Beatty placed *Love and Money* at Paramount and matched the volatile Toback with his own newest recruit—Pauline Kael. For in the spring of 1979, the *New Yorker* critic took indefinite leave of absence to go west, as a producer/script co-ordinator for Beatty. The move raised howls of glee, envy and moral indignation, not least because Toback and Kael had been friendly for some years. But at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel they fell out: she tried to shape what she regarded as very raw material; he felt she was trying to appropriate his film. In the crisis, Beatty backed a film-maker rather than a critic and severed connections with the 60-year-old critic. *Love and Money* is lingering at Paramount and may not command enough of either titled assets at the studio. Kael is at the same studio, acting as a consultant but possibly too proud or too trapped to go back east. A lot of people have laughed, but Beatty's caprice may have stranded a major film and helped compromise the American critic with most character.

Toback will never make a film in which the frenzies on the screen are not the imprint of ideas. That could radically reduce his output. And this is where my sadness for Nick Ray comes back, and where my longing for the ideas talked about in *SIGHT AND SOUND* in 1960 is greatest. I know that from Britain American picture-making looks lively, healthy and glamorous. It is all of those things if you can appreciate that health may be only an adolescent glow. The making of difficult, original, intelligent, humane movies in America is at least as rare now as it ever was. I don't think anyone in America now makes films with the innate style of Ray, Anthony Mann or Minnelli. Malick's gorgeous but hollow *Days of Heaven* shows how self-conscious 'beauty' has become. But that's not unexpected: American film has always resisted or ignored style, just as the country prefers forthright, manly art. And the search for true style must always look after itself. The worry concerns the complicity between stylelessness, the profit imperative and the cheerful naiveté of the 'best' film-makers around.

The complexion of today's new generation—the 'movie brats' is one sentimental description—is depressing. They are kids still, and their movies show an inverse relationship between the skilled whammy and responsible awareness of the world, other people and complex experience. John Carpenter's *Halloween* is the supreme example of skill and cinematic aggression in an undeveloped personality. But that condition is widespread: it enables Brian De Palma to rhapsodise over moving camera sensations while giving up thoughts of the human context. It comes in part from film schools that encourage the young appetite for technology and manipulation, and that allow students to study nothing but film. Even at Dartmouth, where an honourable attempt is made to preserve the substance of a liberal arts education (and where Losey, Bob Rafelson, Frank Gilroy and Buck Henry were students), I have people come to me brimming with the sensation of film but in need of ideas and narratives that can be the pretext for the roller-coaster. At such moments, one fears for a population whose experience may be rooted in imagery, not in life. It makes the restrained pessimism of Susan Sontag's *On Photography* so persuasive that we should regard it as one of the most important books ever written on film—which is only the technological hurrying of stills. And it only makes the editor's question of 1960 more pregnant. ■

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'Photography, which has so many narcissistic uses, is also a powerful instrument for depersonalising our relation to the world; and the two uses are complementary. Like a pair of binoculars with no right or wrong end, the camera makes exotic things near, intimate; and familiar things small, abstract, strange, much farther away. It offers, in one easy, habit-forming activity, both participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others—allowing us to participate, while confirming alienation.'—Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1977.

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# Film Policy for the 80s:

## INDUSTRY OR CULTURE?

Vincent Porter

**'The major economic argument for intervention in industry is that the state can use its purse and influence to bring about structural change in order to resurrect an industry's profitability and viability. Such intervention must, therefore, be of a fairly short term nature. If the structural problems are so severe that a continuing subsidy is needed then the industry can justifiably be supported only because of its strategic, industrial, political or national importance. It is only on the last mentioned criterion that the film industry could strongly justify permanent support.'**—Second Report of the Interim Action Committee on the Film Industry, June 1979

**'We must realise that any state in any society is practising a cultural policy. Even if it does not interfere in any way with culture, it is pursuing a policy because it gives a free hand to other forces that—by power, by money, by monopoly, etc—are in control. A state which leaves film in the hand of commercial forces is in fact pursuing a policy, only not in words, but hidden behind a curtain of aloofness, and therefore making itself less responsible. In fact this attitude is an undemocratic one.'**—Joop Voogd, Rapporteur, *The Cinema and the State*, The Council of Europe, 1979

As Great Britain enters the 1980s, current films legislation expires, the Interim Action Committee publishes its Second Report on Financing the Film Industry and the new Tory Government completes its review of films policy, the reasons for state intervention in the film industry are changing in a fundamental manner. The time has come therefore to examine why government is involved in the film industry at all. Is the film industry really an industry of national importance, as the Interim Action Committee claims? If not, why is it felt necessary to have a policy which is different from that for the theatre, for books or for the ballet?

**'Complete confidence of course can only be achieved by an industry which stands on its own two feet, and the Government hopes that over the next decade the industry will achieve this.'**—Lord Mancroft, introducing the Cinematograph Films Bill, House of Lords, December 1956

**'For a long time now, there has not been a film industry in Britain in the sense of capital or labour permanently employed or waiting to make feature films. There are companies and people able to provide a range of skills, many of which are needed for films, but which can be used in other sectors of industry, for example in the building trade.'**—Second Report of the Interim Action Committee on the Film Industry, June 1979

The undoubted purpose of all three forms of legislative intervention in the film industry—the quota, introduced in 1927, the National Film Finance Corporation, introduced in 1949, and the Eady Levy, made statutory in 1957—has been to develop a *British film industry*. Unfortunately, however, it has never been clear what is meant by a British film industry, and as the second IAC Report makes plain the industrial realities of today are a far cry from the nationalist aspirations of the politicians and the producers of yesteryear. A national industry as such can never be built. In one sense, therefore, the policies of the Tory Government which put the Eady Levy on to a statutory basis in 1957 may be said to have failed.

In another sense, however, it can be claimed that the British film industry, in the limited form recognised by the IAC, is indeed standing on its own two feet. As can be seen from Table 1 (p. 222), there has been a major change in the overseas trading pattern since the heady years of the 60s when Wardour Street was awash with Hollywood capital. Since 1975, earnings by British film producers from performances overseas have been greater than the money paid out by British exhibitors for screening Hollywood films. Furthermore, the finance for production is no longer largely supplied by the U.S. majors. Over the last five years the money invested by them in U.K. production has fallen to an average of a mere £4.3 million per annum. This change in the pattern of trade is reflected in the structural reorganisation of the

industry and in the growing dominance of Lord Grade's Associated Communications Corporation and Lord Delfont's EMI, both of which are now vertically integrated multi-national corporations producing and distributing films on an international scale. As a result, in 1978 the film industry earned £20 million from its overseas activities.

Given this structural and financial change, it is tempting to assume that it has been traditional British film policy that has set the British film industry on its own two feet. Closer examination of the evidence, however, indicates that this change has come about despite film policy and not because of it. It is other factors, outside the control of government, that have made the change possible. How then has British film policy failed?

### Quota

Quota is the oldest of the three main planks of British film policy, but since 1973 quota provisions have been extended to include all Community films. Both the Cinematograph Films Council and now the Interim Action Committee have expressed grave doubts about its effectiveness. The CFC advised the Labour Films Minister, Michael Meacher, to suspend quota, but he declined its advice. His Tory successor, Norman Tebbit, has taken a similar position pending completion of his film policy review. The IAC, on the other hand, was unable to achieve a consensus. Producers and trade unions are generally in favour of maintaining the quota, while distributors and exhibitors are happy to see it go.

The chief fear of British producers and trade unions is that the three main vertically integrated companies, ACC, EMI and Rank, which both own chains of cinemas and invest in film production, might well invest more of their production finance in foreign pictures if the quota were abolished. This fear has been given a further twist by the relaxations in overseas investment policy recently introduced by the Tories, which permit companies to invest up to £5 million per project in foreign projects without paying the dollar premium and which no longer require British multi-national corporations to repatriate two-thirds of their overseas earnings. In contrast, those arguing for abolition point out that despite the existence of quota there was a net outflow of production finance from British companies that were not subsidiaries of the U.S. majors in 1975 and 1976 (see Table 1); and that quota requirements have not prevented substantial overseas investments by both EMI and ACC, who have found it worth their while to produce overseas pictures such as *Convoy*, *The Driver and The Deer Hunter* (EMI) and *The Boys from Brazil*, *Capricorn One* and *Love and Bullets* (ACC).

Even if it could be shown that quota is a disincentive to overseas corporate investment by the British multi-nationals, quota legislation is an ineffective means to achieve this end. It generates a vast amount of paper work both for exhibitors and for the Department of Trade. Elaborate arrangements have been introduced to ensure that cinemas do not suffer commercial harm, by permitting them to spread their quota obligations over two years and by permitting them to reduce their obligations from the standard rate of 30 per cent for the first feature to a figure which in



some cases is as low as 12½ per cent. But even with all these concessions, in 1977 some 181 cinemas (11 per cent of the total) still failed to achieve their quota obligations, and 32 of these were circuit cinemas. Despite the clear collapse of the quota system, no prosecutions have been brought by the Department of Trade, and in many cinemas quota legislation is simply ignored.

Furthermore, many films are now being shown in premises which are technically film clubs and are therefore not licensed by the Department. These clubs pay no attention to quota legislation. Few are film societies interested in the serious study of film; many clubs are simply devices to permit the screening of specialised films, such as hardcore pornographic films or foreign language films for immigrant minorities. These clubs, although legal, are not licensed by the Department of Trade and therefore never appear in the statistics.

For the major film circuits, however, quota continues to be a minor irritant. Although they are doubtless aware of the legalistic advantages to be gained by turning their cinemas into film clubs, there is no doubt that their sense of corporate responsibility prevents them from doing this. Furthermore they do have access to more commercially attractive quota films than their smaller independent rivals, and it is probably for these reasons that quota failures by EMI and Rank are proportionately fewer than those of other cinemas. In addition, it should be noted that both companies own film studios in this country, and it is obviously corporate policy to keep these as full as possible and in turn to keep their exhibition arms supplied with a roster of British films.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the quota is a crude legislative instrument which hurts the weaker, smaller cinema and at best has only a marginal influence on the larger corporation.

**'I never felt the Eady plan was the primary reason for making pictures here either. The primary reason was there were cost savings effected, excellent technicians and a vitality in the city that was conducive to the creative process. That's no longer here.'**—Frank Yablans, former President, Paramount Pictures, *Screen International*, 9 April 1977

## Eady Levy

The effectiveness of the Eady Levy as an arm of British film policy is a far more contentious matter within the industry. The classic rationale for retaining the system in its present form is that it attracts foreign investment, since the opportunity of obtaining an additional bonus from the Levy makes it financially that much more attractive to produce a film in Britain. While it is clearly true that, other factors being equal, an investor will choose to make a film in Britain rather than overseas, in the real world investment choices are not usually that simple. The factors which attract foreign investment are many and complex, including the nature of the subject, the suitability of British locations, the availability of studio space and creative and technical personnel, the exchange rate of the pound and thus the dollar costs of technical labour, of hiring lights, equipment and post-production facilities, as well as the attractions of the Eady Levy. It is only if all the other factors are equal that the Eady incentive will tip the scales in Britain's favour.

There is no doubt that many British producers value the financial leverage that Eady offers, and the less competent have come to rely on it. The U.S. majors take a different view, however, as Frank Yablans, former President of Paramount, indicated in 1977. The overseas trade figures would appear to bear him out. Net production investment attracted to Britain from the U.S. majors declined from an average of £13.5 million between 1969 and 1972 to an average of £4.3 million between 1973 and 1978, despite a shift in the exchange rate of the pound against the dollar which effectively reduced production costs in dollar terms. Foreign investment attracted by other British companies, who are not subsidiaries of the U.S. majors, had hardly risen above £3 million until 1978 and indeed in 1975 and 1976 there was a net outflow of finance. Most of the overseas production investment which does come to these companies will have come in the form of presales for overseas distribution rights, which would not attract the bonus from the Eady Levy.

There is therefore a strong case for thinking that, despite the vigorous defence of the automatic distribution of Eady by the major producers and the trade unions, it does not fulfil the function of attracting overseas

investment which they claim for it. The case has been implicitly accepted by the IAC in their Second Report, when they propose that no more than half the Eady Levy should be distributed on an automatic basis and that even so reforms are needed to ensure that no film which exploits sex or violence should benefit from Eady, that a ceiling is set on the amount which any one film can take out of the Levy, that no short film released with a box-office hit gets undue benefit and that a way is found of making the automatic distribution of Eady compatible with Common Market legislation. In short, an automatic aid scheme which is so hedged around with provisions and limitations that it amounts *de facto* if not *de jure* to a selective scheme.

The IAC also proposes that for the time being annual grants should continue to be paid to the Children's Film Foundation, to the National Film Development Fund, the National Film School and the British Film Institute. The remainder of the Levy should be used in a discretionary way on film production and to a lesser extent on cinemas. The distribution of Eady Levy on an automatic basis is failing industrially and it is therefore proposed to distribute it selectively. Covertly, a failed industrial policy is being transformed into a cultural policy.

**'Well, the last three managing directors of the NFFC have been an accountant, a banker and a lawyer, so to appoint a film-maker is certainly curious, unless it means that the Government has accepted that the situation has changed so drastically that it calls for a new approach.'**—Mamoun Hassan, *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Spring 1979

## NFFC

When the National Film Finance Corporation was set up in 1949, it was clearly established that it was a bank which financed film producers on a commercial basis. It was not its task to differentiate between producers on cultural grounds; its task was to differentiate between them on commercial grounds—supporting the successful and allowing the unsuccessful to fall by the wayside. As an industrial policy the establishment of the

TABLE 1. NET RECEIPTS FROM OVERSEAS FOR PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTION OF FILMS 1968/78 (£ millions)

	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
<i>Performances of films</i>											
(i) U.K. subsidiaries of U.S. majors	(8.9)	(8.5)	(6.6)	(7.9)	(11.6)	(8.0)	(9.4)	(10.4)	(11.1)	(13.5)	(20.1)
(ii) Other companies	3.2	4.0	2.9	4.8	3.6	3.4	5.6	14.4	14.1	18.1	27.3
(iii) All companies (i) + (ii)	(5.7)	(4.5)	(3.7)	(3.1)	(8.0)	(4.6)	(3.8)	4.0	3.0	4.6	7.2
<i>Production of films</i>											
(iv) U.K. subsidiaries of U.S. majors	26.4	13.1	11.9	15.3	13.8	3.8	2.6	3.3	4.3	3.9	8.2
(v) Other companies	2.4	5.2	3.2	2.4	2.6	2.7	1.6	(2.6)	(1.2)	1.5	4.7
(vi) All companies (iv) + (v)	28.8	18.3	15.1	17.7	16.4	6.5	4.2	0.7	3.1	5.4	12.9
<i>Total receipts</i>											
(vii) U.K. subsidiaries (i) + (iv)	17.5	4.6	5.3	7.4	2.2	(4.2)	(6.8)	(7.1)	(6.8)	(9.6)	(11.9)
(viii) Other companies (ii) + (v)	5.6	9.2	6.1	7.2	6.2	6.1	7.2	11.8	12.9	19.6	32.0
(ix) All companies (iii) + (vi)	23.1	13.8	11.4	14.6	8.4	1.9	0.4	4.7	6.1	10.0	20.1

Source: Department of Trade

Figures in brackets = negative.



TABLE II. EADY LEVY 1977/78

	£ millions
Total Levy yield	6.617
Net Levy yield*	6.658
Grant to Children's Film Foundation	0.500
Grant to National Film Development fund	0.200
Grant to National Film School	0.150
Grant to British Film Institute	0.033
Amount Paid to British film-makers	5.775
<i>Less</i>	
Reduction after implementation of accountancy study (E)	1.500
Amount to be divided between NFFC and British film-makers (E)	4.275
Amount to be paid to British film-makers (E)	2.137
Amount to be paid to NFFC/BFA (E)	2.137

\*i.e. less Customs and Excise and BFFA expenses plus interest. (E) Estimated.

NFFC failed years ago, but subsequent governments bailed the Corporation out of its difficulties. Interest charges were written off, new advances were made available, but the fiction that the role of the NFFC was industrial was maintained. After all, it ill behove the Department of Trade to dabble in cultural affairs. The Terry Report on the Future of the Film Industry called on the Government not to loan money but to invest money in its new *alter ego* the British Film Authority, sharing the profits (if any) as well as the losses. In short, a euphemism for an interest free loan to an institution whose track record for successes lay not in its financial but in its cultural role. Certainly Michael Meacher's appointment of Mamoun Hassan as Managing Director and of Colin Young and Romaine Hart as members of the NFFC's Board indicate that he saw the NFFC playing a more interventionist and culturally oriented role.

Now, even the Tories appear to have accepted that the NFFC has a cultural function. In his written reply to the House of Commons on 26 July 1979 on future plans for the Corporation, the Secretary of State for Trade, John Nott, said that there was 'a continuing role for a body to help mobilise finance for the production of British films of an indigenous character.' No longer is the function of the NFFC to be industrial, it is to be cultural.

**'Most of those who have been consulted in the course of this review and who have expressed support for a NFFC-type activity base their case on the desirability of producing indigenous British films for commercial showing. This does not mean films produced for only a minority audience or for showing only in specialised cinemas. It means films made with British talent . . . and which will be likely to depict aspects of British life and culture. Some films will be influenced in the first place by the taste of British audiences, but they should also be capable of achieving some response in international markets, without which it is difficult for a film to recoup its cost.'**—Department of Trade, *Review of Policy on Film Finance*, June 1979, paragraph 18

**'There would be a case, however, for giving the (National Film Finance) Corporation, if its funds were to be renewed, the financial objective of making a return on its portfolio of investments as a whole rather than on each investment. It has been represented also that the Corporation needs to be financed in such a way that, like others in the business, it could take risks on films which might turn out to be either loss-makers or highly profitable, the successful projects covering the losses on the inevitable proportion of failures.'**—*Review of Policy on Film Finance*, paragraph 26

The failure of quota policy, of the automatic distribution of the Eady Levy and of the NFFC as a commercial operation point logically to a cultural policy for film. And indeed this is what is being proposed, although it is a cultural policy which emanates from the Department of Trade and not from the Duchy of Lancaster, which is responsible for such matters. It is a policy which emerges from the interaction of the rather vague cultural aspirations outlined in paragraph 18 of the Department of Trade's *Review of Policy on Film Finance* and the rather specious financial arguments outlined in paragraph 26.

No thought, however, appears to have been given to how those cultural aspirations will interact with the hard commercial realities of international film finance. Furthermore, the contradictions between the financial and cultural objectives of the NFFC have been intensified by the methods of financing the Corporation's activities which have been decided upon by the Government. While the decision to write off the Corporation's debts to the Government and 'the possibility of a once-and-for-all Government investment' in the NFFC, to be decided later this year, will give the new, revitalised Corporation a clean slate from which to start, the limited amount of Eady money going to the NFFC—probably between £1 million and £1.5 million per annum over a set period of years—will limit the number of projects in which it can invest to about three or four low budget films per year at the outside. For anything more ambitious, and certainly if it is to invest in enough films to make a return on its portfolio as a whole,

then the Corporation will have to look to sources of private investment.

The Corporation is, of course, already involved with private investment through its membership of the National Film Finance Consortium. While it would be dangerous to assume that the investment policy of any future joint financing operation between the NFFC and the private sector would follow the path of the National Film Finance Consortium, which came out of the films policy of the last Tory Government, it is also the best model that we have.

During the first six years of its operation, the Consortium has financed the production of nineteen features, one short film and a children's television series. It began with a period of financing resolutely working-class comedies and TV spinoffs such as *Up Pompeii*, *Ooh! . . . You Are Awful* and *Steptoe and Son Ride Again*, designed primarily for the last residues of the British national market. With the continuing decline of that market, and the progressively impossible task of producing British films on budgets low enough to cover their costs in the U.K., even with the benefits of the Eady Levy, the Corporation gradually switched to higher budget pictures such as *Stardust*, *The Man Who Fell To Earth* and *The Duellists*, designed more specifically for the American and the international markets.

During this period, the Consortium advanced almost £3 million in loans and up to 30 June 1978 had recouped approximately half in advances repaid. The other half of its advances are currently invested in production and are at risk. Of the nineteen feature films, the investment record of the fourteen on which it is now possible to assess results is fairly even-handed. Two made serious losses, three made moderate losses, four have broken even or are likely to break even, two have made satisfactory profits and three have made exceptional profits. Thus the original £1.75 million with which the Consortium was set up in 1972 has yielded its members a total of £464,000 in interest and profits spread over six years, or an annual return of a measly 4.4 per cent. on capital.

If the NFFC is to succeed in attracting funds from private investors, whether from the merchant banks who are already participants in the Consortium, from the Finance Corporation for Industry as has been rumoured in the press, or from elsewhere, then it will have to convince them that they can get better returns than that. Can these really be achieved by financing small budget indigenous pictures of the type outlined in the Department of Trade's *Review of Policy on Film Finance*? Is not the inexorable financial logic, as perceived by the Lords Delfont and Grade, but apparently ignored by the IAC and by the Department of Trade, that big profits come from big markets—and in particular from the American market? And that this in its turn means big budgets both for producing and for marketing the films, which are beyond the financial scope of the NFFC as currently envisaged.

The second, subsidiary argument in the Department of Trade's *Review*, about the financial benefits to be reaped by requiring the NFFC to make a return on its portfolio of investments as a whole, is also suspect. The Corporation has always averaged its financial



# TRUFFAUT

## Twenty years after

Don Allen

*Twenty years and twenty films after launching the New Wave with his first feature, Les Quatre Cents Coups, François Truffaut talked in Paris recently about the New Wave, the state of the cinema and himself.*

**Would it be true to describe your feelings about the New Wave or what remains of it as pessimistic?**

TRUFFAUT: Not really. As you know, there are no pessimists and no optimists, as the moralist said, there are only sad fools and happy fools. So I don't want to fall into the trap of saying I am pessimistic. But there has been a lot of talk recently about the New Wave because it is the twentieth anniversary of the collection of films which began to appear in 1959. And in all such movements,

quite apart from any artistic considerations, there is the phenomenon of friendship and individual and group relationships and their inevitable deterioration. In France the picture is especially complicated, and not only as far as the cinema is concerned, by the watershed of May 1968. If one thinks of those of us who used to meet together in one another's homes at a time when the future seemed to offer happy prospects for everyone, well, relationships have rather deteriorated since then. Some are in worse health now than twenty years ago. Some had high hopes which remain unfulfilled. Friendships have been betrayed. There are a few people whose beauty increases with age but these are the exceptions. So my thoughts about the New Wave are not uplifting. Exaggerating a little, you could say that at the time we were young, handsome and likeable. And it's anyone's

guess whether the last part of the phrase still applies.

**Are the opportunities to make a first film now in France any greater than they were twenty years ago for a young person with no money and no connections?**

No, in that in 1959 there was a sudden opening up of possibilities and anyone could make a film. Now the situation has stabilised, but there are still some thirty first films made in France each year by unknowns thanks to the financial support system of loans repayable against the film's future receipts.

The situation of the film is more and more like that of the book. It's not very difficult to get a book published. The difficult thing is to get the book into the bookshop window and to get it bought and read. It's the same with

*On the set of 'L'Amour en Fuite': François Truffaut, Nestor Almendros*





the cinema. More and more good films are being made but their fate is less happy than they deserve. It seems to be the case that even the most intelligent and cultured filmgoers frequently prefer a film which is simple but slickly made to one which is intelligent but clumsy. Intellectuals often reject intellectual films made by intellectuals for intellectuals. A case in point in France is Pierre Kast, a highly cultured and literary director who writes articulate and marvellously convincing dialogue and only makes films about intellectuals. And his films are rejected by his intellectual peers, who would rather see, say, a bad, naive Western than an intelligent one—unless of course it happens to be labelled a masterpiece.

The trouble with many new films, not merely in France, is that their ambition is often greater than the technical expertise with which they are made. In other words, throughout the world there are many uneven films because of the discrepancy between their philosophical or moral intentions, which are too high, and their execution, which is often rather weak. You might call it the crisis of the cinema today.

If you take film production in Hollywood up to the 40s and even the 50s, you have films which give an impression of naiveté on the screen but which were in fact very intelligently made. I think this is true for Hawks' *Big Sky*, *Red River* and *Airforce* for instance, films which the intellectual may find naive and pandering to mass taste and with little concern for psychological conviction, but which were in fact made with a great deal of intelligence behind the camera.

For me, the film that marks the beginning of the period of decadence in the cinema is the first James Bond—*Dr No*. Until then the role of the cinema had been by and large to tell a story in the hope that the audience would believe it. There had been a few minority films which were parodies of this narrative tradition, but in the main a film told a story and the audience wanted to believe that story. And at this point we might reopen the old polemic about Hitchcock. For years English critics were reluctant to accept that the films Hitchcock made in America were superior to those he had made in England. The difference for me lies in the fact that Hitchcock's desire to make the audience believe the story is stronger in his American films than in his English ones.

But the reason I talk of a period of decadence ushered in by the Bond films is that before that parody had been of only minority or snob appeal, but with the Bond films it became a popular genre. For the first time throughout the world mass audiences were exposed to what amounts to a degradation of the art of cinema, a type of cinema which relates neither to life nor to any romantic tradition but only to other films and always by sending them up. What's more, Hitchcock's career began to suffer from the time of the arrival of the first Bond films, since they were a sort of plagiarised version of *North By Northwest*, his finest thriller. He could not compete with the Bond films and after this he was increasingly obliged to make small-budget films. Perhaps he was also getting rather too old. For instance, had he been ten years younger he might well have made disaster movies. Don't forget he went to America to film *The Titanic* but this was replaced by *Rebecca*.



'L'Amour en Fuite': Jean-Pierre Léaud plays Antoine Doinel for, Truffaut says, the last time

**Don't you think that disaster movies and super-productions are also in a sense a degradation of cinema—or at least of your concept of cinema?**

No, they mark a return to the origins of cinema, to the first ten or fifteen years. This doesn't worry me at all. The cinema is condemned to produce remakes because too many films are being made and there are too few dramatic situations available. So the whole history of the cinema is studded with remakes, and this is fine as long as the remakes are better than the originals. Six-reelers were better than three-reelers. There was a loss of quality at the beginning of the talkies but the introduction of sound did not prevent a film like *King Kong* from being very beautifully designed and very ambitious visually. And there are different mixtures. For example, for a long time it was customary to make period films too respectfully and without the physical explicitness that is to be found in the modern love film. So a remake, say, of *Scarlet Pimpernel*, whose subject matter is very daring, could be very positive if it received a more erotic and sexually convincing treatment.

But the problem now is the need to combat colour. How wrong we were to think that colour was an improvement and not a handicap.

**Surely this is just part of your general nostalgia?**

No. Perfection in the cinema consists in the knowledge that whatever happens there is a barrier between the film and 'reality'. Colour has removed this last barrier. If there is nothing false in a film it is not a film—one is in competition with the documentary and the result is very boring. Like much of the film shot for American television, which I find lacking in any fictional dimension, anti-dramatic, over-documentary and very boring. And a large part of modern cinema is like that.

Colour is the enemy. For me it is now much more interesting to construct a flat on the set than to film in a real flat. Because in the

studio one at least has the possibility of winning the battle against the ugliness of colour, for example by the use of a lot of night shots or by concentrating on the artificial aspects.

**Was the element of colour important in *La Chambre Verte*?**

It wasn't a problem. I didn't shoot either *La Chambre Verte* or *Adèle H* as I would have done in black and white. I avoided showing any streets or period reconstructions or extras in costume. It's in all those areas that danger exists. Also in both these films most of the action takes place at night and night becomes almost part of the décor.

We must return to artifice if we are to stop our films looking like documentaries. I think this is probably what first attracted me to Hitchcock. If there has been one constant thought throughout my life it is the conviction that the enemy of the sort of cinema that I personally like is the documentary. I have never filmed a documentary in my life and I hope I never do. Not that I cannot admire some of those who have made documentaries, like Marcel Ophüls with *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*. But what first attracted me to the cinema was my love of fiction and what led me to want to make films was the desire to structure a fictional story.

**Are there directors of photography who share your ideas on colour?**

There are some who at least ask themselves the same questions. For example, it's not by chance that Nestor Almendros received this year's Academy Award for his work on *Days of Heaven* directed by Terry Malick. And there are five or six excellent directors of photography in France whose aesthetic corresponds to my own. They fight against real light, they try to invent an artificial light and to rediscover the secrets of the old black and white cameramen and apply them to colour. That's it in a nutshell.

**And what of the new directors in France? Who do you think is on a level with you and who will one day take your place?**



The one I like best is Eric Rohmer but of course he is of my generation, in fact older than me. But among the newcomers I think one of the best is Claude Miller.

**Who has acted in one of your films.**

I don't think so.

**Yes he did, in *L'Enfant Sauvage*.**

Oh yes, that's right, with his wife and baby. He has worked a great deal with me since then, not so much as an assistant but as production manager. I like his films very much. Then there is Jean-François Stevenin, who had a part in *La Nuit Américaine* and also *L'Argent de Poche*. He's a very good actor and director, but I think I prefer him as an actor and anyway he has only directed one film. Someone else who worked with me (and it's not just because they have worked with me that I think they are good!) is Pierre Zucca, who was the stills photographer on *La Nuit Américaine*, and he has made a sophisticated literary/erotic film called *Roberte, ce Soir*, which is a very beautiful film.

**Can we then talk of the emergence of a Truffaut school?**

No, not at all, because these people are all influenced by other directors than myself. Stevenin is influenced by Bob Rafelson and John Cassavetes and not at all by me. Claude Miller has certainly been influenced by Bergman, but if he has points in common with me it's more a question of affinity. For example I share his liking for Bergman, but there is certainly no question of a school, none whatsoever.

**And what about you? Are you not influenced personally by the work of these young directors?**

I think one is influenced above all by what one has seen and experienced before beginning to make films. It is difficult to be influenced after one has begun. It may happen from time to time but the profound influences occur much earlier, say between the ages of 8 and 15 from the point of view of the emotions and between 15 and 25 from the point of view of style. Afterwards one is constantly refining and polishing one's own personal code, even struggling against it, but it seems to me that one is no longer subject to many other influences.

**But isn't there also the attendant danger of adhering to over-rigid formulae, knowing that when you have solved a problem one way in a particular film you will tend to use the same solution in subsequent films?**

I don't think so entirely. It's true, my films often go in pairs, there is often a film which is like one I made three or four years before, but often I will seek to complicate the problem or to resolve a new difficulty. And sometimes I want to improve something and it turns out worse than my original effort, and then what happens is that a third film emerges which is the synthesis of the previous two. I think that is the way it works.

**You are referring to technical problems?**

I would say aesthetic rather than technical. For example, how can I make a film which follows one straight line with no distractions? For me the question arises in that sort of way. How can I film a short story which appears to last only one hour even if it really lasts one



*'L'Homme qui Aimait les Femmes': Charles Denner taking the scientific view of women*

and a half hours? Or on the other hand how can I make a film in which all the characters have the same importance? These are exercises of self-development—part technical, part literary, because they are linked with the development of the script.

**Can you give examples?**

Not really. It's just this alternating pattern between films based on one character and those which attempt to strike a balance between the characters. And for instance the last Doinel film, *L'Amour en Fuite*, borrows some things from the earlier Doinel films but in its construction it is closer to *L'Homme qui Aimait les Femmes* with its use of the voice-over technique, the commentary and the attempt to impose a unity on very disparate material.

**Is the commentary important because it conveys a literary tone?**

No, rather a first person, confidential tone. And the influence here goes back to my childhood and the war years and it is the influence of Sacha Guitry and the charm of the first person narrative.

**Are you not also influenced in this respect by Henri-Pierre Roché, two of whose novels you have adapted for the cinema? And doesn't *L'Homme qui Aimait les Femmes* also owe a lot to Roché?**

Not too much. I tried to avoid being poetic in this film. I gave the hero a scientific occupation and so I wanted him to talk of women from a scientific angle. I was thinking of Howard Hughes, who sent a very famous memo about how Jane Russell's brassiere should be constructed for *Outlaw*—an extraordinary, highly moving memo of about thirty or forty lines, in which he refers to this bra with incredible precision as if it were an aeroplane engine. So I think it's this scientific aspect I was after in *L'Homme qui Aimait les Femmes*, when Denner says that women's legs are compasses... This is not the atmosphere of Roché, who is a 'sentimentalist'. The

sexual dimension in Roché causes no pain. Everything is delightful; everything goes well; it's all too easy. But in my film there is more pain.

But I have certainly been much influenced by Roché. In some respects I am tempted to describe him as better than Cocteau because he achieves the same effects of 'poetic' style more economically. When Cocteau was describing *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* he said they were like aerial views of Greece. Roché in my opinion achieves this same effect more simply. What I like about Roché is his prodigious refinement, which enables him to use very few words. One always feels he has the vocabulary of a peasant or of someone who has never read a book or who has just learned to read and write—and that is the height of refinement. If we examine his manuscripts we see this was achieved by ruthless cutting in order to achieve the intentionally arid style. I'm no great admirer of my own film version of *Jules et Jim* (I'm pleased it has such a good reputation but it is not as good as its reputation) but it's true that if I listen to the words I still admire the same sentences. Do you remember when they go off to Greece?—'Ils s'étaient fait faire de clairs costumes pareils—they had identical light-coloured suits made.' Only Roché could write that.

And there is a love of things female in general. The refusal to be interested in one type of woman rather than another and the idea that if the personality of the woman is strong then she is to be admired, but above all the refusal to prefer one type of woman to another.

**I wanted to ask you about your fascination with language. You are a 'literary' film-maker who has talked a great deal about language in his films and elsewhere. Could you attempt to evaluate the importance of language in your work and its function as an aid, or obstacle, to communication? One thinks particularly of *Fahrenheit 451*, *Domicile Conjugal* and *L'Enfant Sauvage*.**



It's not something I was particularly conscious of until I read it in articles and reviews. I have been attracted by certain themes and I have sometimes wanted to show books in my films or at least the importance of the written word, but I wouldn't theorise about it. Incidentally it's true that in everyday life I would rather write a letter than telephone. The phone is an aggression. I hate it when it rings. With a letter you can either read it when it arrives or later. You can reply when you wish or not at all. It seems to me more democratic, less authoritarian. So in my films people often communicate by letter. And books are also important.

As far as communication is concerned I am a great optimist. I am sceptical about the idea of the impossibility of communication. I think it has been greatly exaggerated and it has become a fashionable thing to believe. But I believe in communication and understanding. Things *can* be communicated. You *can* describe what you are feeling. You *can* talk.

**On a more personal level, how do you explain your difficulty in mastering the English language?**

I'm very bad at reproducing sounds, but it's a big paradox because after seeing a film twice I know the music by heart, so there is something strange here. I simply can't reproduce the sounds of English. Perhaps because I began late and I didn't continue my formal education for long, so I tended to learn only what seemed vital or useful for earning a living. I never had any of the formal discipline people usually receive during their secondary education. Also I may be rejecting it on a subconscious level. I don't really know, but it's very frustrating.

I was very pleased when I first learned to read English. The first thing I read was the collection of memos by David Selznick, which was fantastic. I was so happy because a year before I could not have read it. I haven't tried novels yet, only biographies and books on the cinema. But this represents a considerable progression. But speaking and

understanding will always be very difficult for me and I shall never completely manage them.

**In your films you frequently depict the lonely man, the outsider. Does this portrayal of the solitude of man represent your own philosophy?**

Not my philosophy of life, but in the cinema there is one kind of film that especially moves me and that is the film with a spoken commentary, for example *Les Enfants Terribles* or *Roman d'un Tricheur* or *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*. It is as if the director is speaking directly to me and confiding in me as I sit there in the dark. Conversely I have been disappointed, even by films made by directors I admire, when they give the principal character a friend or confidant and my pleasure is spoilt, because even though I want to be interested in the hero as soon as I know he has a friend I am less interested in what he has to say. An example would be Bresson's *Pickpocket*. I like the film, but the pickpocket has a friend who has guessed his secret and for that reason I cannot completely sympathise with him as I am not that friend. The same is true for my friend Claude Miller's *Dites-lui que je l'aime*.

So when I am making a film I pay great attention to this aspect. In *L'Homme qui Aimait les Femmes* there is a direct allusion to it in the dialogue when someone says—'You will never see that guy with a man after six p.m.' In any case he has no friends, but after six p.m. he will never tolerate the presence of a male. For that reason I think the audience can feel sympathy for, and closeness to, Charles Denner. In *Adèle H* if I had given Adèle a confidant there would not have been a film. The audience is alone with her. That's the feeling I particularly want to get across. It probably comes from my childhood feelings of identification with the hero. I have no time for modern anti-identification theories. If theoreticians and even directors want to indulge in this, O.K., but for my part a film in which the audience identifies with the hero is

in no way an inferior genre. On the contrary, it's what moves me most.

I reached the age of eighteen before seeing a single film of Errol Flynn because he only made period films and I never went to see period films. It was some time before I chose films by directors. My first criterion then was the subject matter and I had to work this out from the title. There was always love plus something in the Hollywood films of the period—love plus adventure or love plus western or love plus thriller (my favourite was love plus thriller because there were always characters in raincoats dressed in modern style and therefore it was easy to identify with them). So I preferred Alan Ladd to Errol Flynn. But I liked Bogart best of all, of course, and the Hollywood psychological films—not that the psychology was particularly refined—and films based on characters with a secret or films of a certain intensity, and above all they had to be modern. The pleasure I experienced was in the company of these rather solitary characters.

There are of course also autobiographical reasons. The fact that I was an only child, as you know, is a very important factor. I think I get on better with people who were only children than with those who had a lot of brothers and sisters. I have a much better understanding of the psychology of the only child. With the only child there is less of the competitive spirit. I personally consider myself very uncompetitive in life. I am part of the French cinema, but the idea of being superior to any other director never occurs to me.

**A criticism which could be levelled at you is that you haven't really made much progress in your films. I know you endorse Renoir's dictum that a film-maker makes only one film throughout his life and that the rest are merely reworkings of the ideas of that first film. But don't you agree that you do rely too heavily on autobiography, or would you regard this as inevitable? Don't you feel attracted to the idea of a totally new departure?**

It doesn't worry me if it is said that I am not making any progress. I agree, whatever progress one makes is always very small indeed. One gives the richest part of oneself at the beginning. You could perhaps even say that it's not worth making the cinema your whole career. You should just make say three or four films, which like the first three or four songs of a singer or a songwriter will be the richest. But as it is the activity one most enjoys, one carries on. Even so, I do sometimes make films on difficult subjects...

**Like *La Chambre Verte*?**

Yes, films like that where I 'get out of trouble', an expression I prefer to use rather than say I 'succeed'. Films which turn out fairly well and I can say that perhaps ten years earlier I wouldn't have managed it, I wouldn't have 'won the bet'. Take the case of *Adèle H*. This was a bet to be won, and it was not lost, but it needed a certain experience in the 'business' before one could attempt a film with so few elements. Nor do I think it would be possible to make *La Nuit Américaine* as a first film. Experience and film-craft are required and one obviously has less film-craft at the beginning of one's career. Sincerity is fine for one's first film, but I don't think one can base one's whole career on sincerity. In addition one needs a little technique and a

François Truffaut in 'La Chambre Verte', based on Henry James' 'The Altar of the Dead'





little skill and of course a little luck. Nothing happens without luck.

**You are still talking of the need to 'win bets', as you have been for years now. Nineteen years ago with your second film *Tirez sur le Pianiste* you took a lot of risks. Many people in England consider it your most exciting film even though it was a commercial flop. With very few exceptions, you hardly seem to have taken a risk since. You now have a solid financial base. Could you not now risk again a new departure, rather than continue, for example, the Antoine Doinel themes and characters, as you do in *L'Amour en Fuite*?**

I think that the charm of *Pianiste* arises from the element of chance, and this same element is also present in *Baisers Volés*. What these two films have in common is the fact that in each case it is impossible to anticipate what will happen next. And it is true that apart from the Doinel films I always know what is supposed to happen before I begin shooting—at least in general, though of course it is possible to improvise some of the details, because I have confidence in the actors. But during the filming of *Pianiste* I suffered from not knowing what was going to happen to the main character nor what the whole thing was really about. It was a genuine experiment, and it is true that I no longer have the stomach to try something as completely experimental again.

If I were doing *Pianiste* now I would say to myself—Who is that man? What does he want? I would understand the story whereas at the time if I felt like shooting a particular scene I just did it and then followed it with another that was completely different. Though I think this was more acceptable in the climate of the early 60s. I think that if it appeared now it would meet with even greater indifference than it did then. Even so, if there were a thriller that I wanted to film, I would still do it but not with the same naivete, simply because I no longer have that naivete. In *Pianiste* there was the element of luck and the charm of Marie Dubois and Nicole Berger and the strangeness of the Aznavour

character. It could have been better and it could have been worse, but I'm not sure it could be done again. When I began *La Mariée était en Noir* I was convinced it would be like *Pianiste* but better. But it turned out worse, though I think the colour was a factor here. It was a film that should have been mysterious and yet wasn't. Then I thought I had a good chance with *La Sirène du Mississippi* which was a huge flop—I like the love story but the thriller aspect is very slipshod. On the other hand, it is always a little artificial and absurd to take these American stories and import them into France.

#### **Will you go on asking the same questions?**

I've no idea. I have some films which I haven't yet made and which I certainly will make. For example, I should like to make a love story against a background of classical music. I should also like to make a film on France under the Occupation. I shall have to check my files and meet some Jews who worked clandestinely in Paris during the war and who will tell me of their experiences. I am also meeting some young musicians from the Conservatoire, and according to the richness of these conversations I will decide what to film next. Perhaps I will take the subject which needs least research.

**So you still need this foundation of 'truth' and real life? From this point of view you haven't changed in twenty years. And likewise you remain socially and politically uncommitted?**

Yes, partly for autobiographical reasons. I don't feel one hundred per cent French and I don't know the whole truth about my origins. I've never tried to obtain my voting card so I can't vote. I would feel I was performing a very artificial act if I voted, as if I were acting a part. So I feel no attachment to France and could well finish my days in a different country. Just as the notion of patriotism has no hold on me, so too when people try to explain their religion to me I remain sceptical

and feel they cannot be sincere—which is stupid because they are. I just cannot hold their beliefs. My religion is the cinema. I believe in Charlie Chaplin, etc. As for politics I think its importance has been greatly exaggerated and over-valued for the last ten years. Politics for me simply amounts to doing the housework; if the dust needs getting rid of this morning we get rid of it—without talking about it; if the ashtrays need emptying we empty them, but it is not the most important task of the day. It's necessary, but if it becomes the sum total of our conversation or of our day, then it is folly. The same applies to politics. Politicians do not deserve star status. They should simply be modest and efficient charwomen.

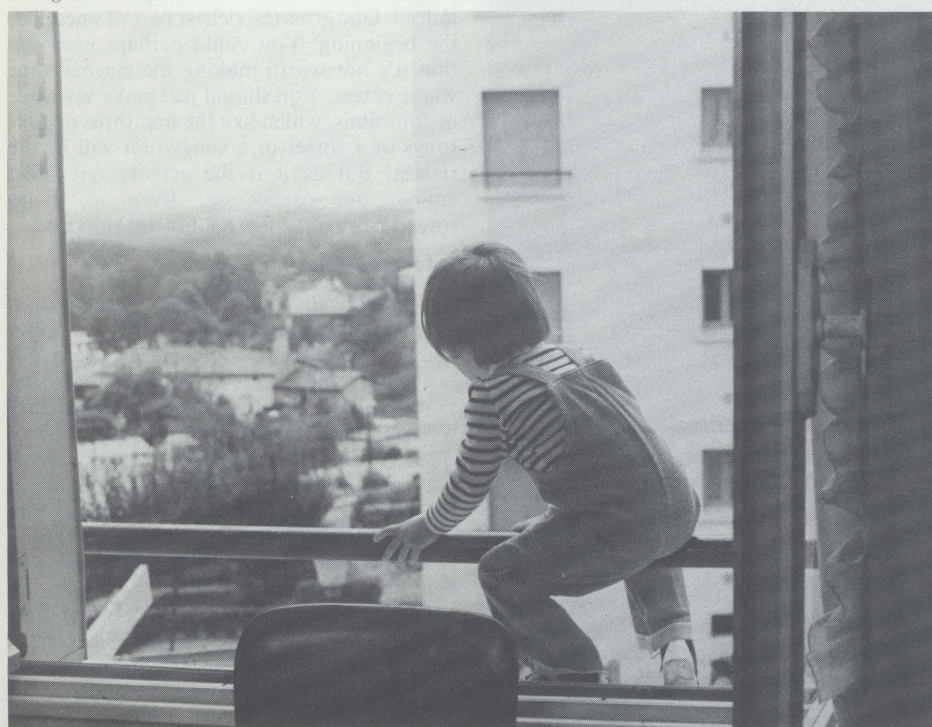
**So politics doesn't change people's lives or the structures of society?**

Only very slowly. And the slower it is, the more effective it is. Changes are not spectacular. What's more, if it is felt that in twenty years' time a film with a political content will give a clearer picture of the society in which it is made than a non-political film, this is quite untrue. Some of the sophisticated Hollywood comedies say as much about America years ago as any films aimed at denouncing some particular social abuse. The idea that one must strive to reflect the society in which one lives is false—because one will do so in any case, intentionally or not. Salvador Dali gave painters this advice: Above all don't worry about being 'modern' because unfortunately, whatever you do, you will be.

There is a lot of pressure on film-makers from the media to get them to introduce a political dimension, even an artificial one, into their work. It is very important to resist these pressures. Film-making should be a pleasure, not a duty. We must be free to follow our instincts in our choice of subject. You don't make a film to please a particular section of public opinion. You make a film for your own pleasure and in the hope that the audience will share it. If film-making became a duty I would do something else. The number one question for me is how one spends one's time. One must give oneself a time-table that one likes, which is why I chose the cinema. Otherwise I might perhaps write. But the most important thing for me is to be free of all constraints.

This political blackmail of recent years is a negative and disagreeable aspect of our times. Fortunately it's coming to an end—cruelly. Thanks to the paradox of history; thanks to the fact that the Ayatollah Khomeini is worse than the former Shah of Iran; thanks to the fact that the Vietnamese have invaded Cambodia and the Chinese have supported the Cambodians; thanks to all these gory paradoxes it is clear that people cannot be pushed in one single direction. Life is full of paradoxes and the cinema must reflect these paradoxes. And in so-called political films there is no life because there are no paradoxes. The film director goes to work knowing in advance who is the corrupt police inspector, who is the dishonest property developer, who is the brave, young reporter, etc. For a long time in France André Cayatte was the only director to make this type of film. Since 1968 there has been a vogue for what I call 'neo-Cayattism'—which, as a spectator, I absolutely refuse to see and, as a film-maker, I absolutely refuse to practise. ■

'L'Argent de Poche'





# In The Picture

## Pontecorvo's Ogre

Three Italian films were scheduled to receive their premières at the Venice Biennale festival in September: the Taviani brothers' *Il Prato*, Bertolucci's *La Luna*, and a third film, at the time of writing provisionally entitled *Operazione Ogro* (*Operation Ogre*), directed by Gillo Pontecorvo—his first film since *Queimada*, released exactly ten years ago.

Originally to be called *The Tunnel*, a title pre-empted by a French production company while Pontecorvo was editing in Rome, *Operation Ogre* was shot in the centre of Madrid over a period of nine months, after three years of gestation, with Gian Maria Volonté, Angela Molina (Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire*), Saverio Marconi (the son in *Padre Padrone*) and Beppe Sacristan, from a screenplay by Pontecorvo, Giorgio Arlorio and Ugo Pirro. The film deals with the assassination of Luis Carrero Blanco, blown up in his armoured car in December 1973 by four Basque terrorists from ETA.

'A lot of people in Madrid believe that without the elimination of Blanco, who was the one person capable of carrying on Franco's regime, the replacement of dictatorship by democracy would not have been possible in Spain,' Pontecorvo maintains. The film covers the group's preparation and execution of the bombing, the erosion of their solidarity, and the conflict when one of the guerrillas (played by the Spanish actor Eusebio Consola), who has married the only woman member of the group, decides he will continue the armed struggle even after the advent of Spanish democracy, and consequently brings about the break-up of the group and his marriage. 'I've put these young people under a magnifying glass in order to burn out the psychology of the situation, and as a way of illuminating what's going on in Italy as well,' Pontecorvo says.

Shooting the film, he was beset by continual threats and interruptions: 'The Francoists still have a stronghold in the centre of Madrid. They forbade us to shoot in certain streets and wouldn't give us work permits—in short, they boycotted the film.' The atmosphere surrounding the production was one of constant political tension. 'There was a bomb attack every day, and I lived through

some dangerous moments. The attacks were the work of the section of ETA which is still carrying on the armed struggle. The army, which is still of major importance in Spain, was in a state of ferment, and there were even fears of a *coup d'état*.' Made in the political suspense-thriller style of *The Battle of Algiers*, *Operation Ogre* covers the six months the Basques plotted in a city they hardly knew, abandoning the idea of trying to kidnap Blanco and digging their seemingly endless tunnel in a desperate enterprise ('a bit like trying to blow someone up in the middle of the Via Veneto in Rome, outside the American embassy'). Personal and political differences come to a head amid the stress, isolation and attrition of the four 'moles'.

One of the reasons so much time has elapsed since his last film Pontecorvo puts down to doubt: 'I got a block because I felt it necessary to rethink what I'd done, continually reflect on my films and try to find certainties and assurances.' Three years ago he was involved in a project for a film about Christ: 'An epic with mass scenes, about the Messianic urge of a new world. I envisaged authentic Mediterranean faces in the film, but the Americans wanted a star to play Christ, and I refused.' But Pontecorvo has not entirely abandoned the project, and is thinking of returning to it.

'I walked off the set of *Mister Klein* two weeks after work started because I didn't consider Alain Delon to be right for the part—perhaps I was over hasty, in view of the fact that a director of Losey's calibre then took it on.' After *Queimada*, he spent months in the States trying to shoot a film about the American Indians with Marlon Brando. But perhaps the principal reason for his inactivity is his refusal to get sucked into a 'star system' and lose political and artistic control over his projects. 'The new directors are all oriented towards producing spectacular films for an infantile audience—Steven Spielberg, after a courageous film like *Duel*, went on to make *Jaws*, and immediately got immersed in the system. Nowadays the protagonists of the "star system" are the directors. They can make millions, so it's difficult to resist. The same thing has happened in Italy. Neo-realism corresponded to a period of enormous optimism, but I

suspect that the new young Italian directors don't have this optimism any more.'

After the Christ project, he would like to set his next film in Milan. 'An Italian story, set in Milan, where I lived during the Resistance and after the war. It's a city that has always given me a warm sensation which I can no longer find in Rome.' It is to be hoped that this project is not another ten years in gestation: 'I'd promised myself to stop being so rigorous and set about making a film every two or three years, but the more time passed, the more difficult it became. But I'll have to get back to work soon so that I can provide an outlet for my incurable doubts.'

TONY MITCHELL

## Annecy '79

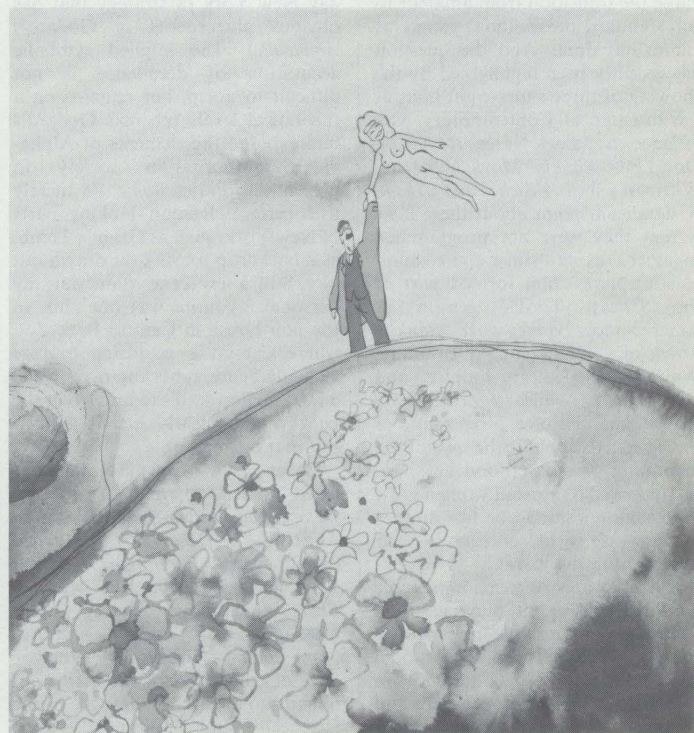
Annecy, one time Mecca of animation, seems possessed by an increasingly determined death wish. Those startled by the arrogance with which in 1975 it rejected Bob Godfrey's *Great* (which went on to win an Academy Award) were dumbfounded that this year's pre-selection jury contrived an even greater insult by turning down Godfrey's latest, *Dream Doll*, co-directed with Zlatko Grgic, co-produced with Zagreb and Halas and Batchelor, and dedicated to Zelimir Matko, who initiated the film. Maybe the opportunity of simultaneously snubbing so many major names in animation was too tempting for the pre-selectors? Maybe the 'international' nature of the pre-selection jury, forced upon the organisers, was as shallow as the non-French believed? Shown out of competition, *Dream Doll* received the festival's biggest public ovation and almost won the critics' prize. Bob Godfrey, Ted Rockley, Ian Emes and other British animators boycotted Annecy, promising not to return until genuine international pre-selection holds sway.

*Dream Doll* tells the melancholy tale of a lonely middle-aged man besotted with a literally pneumatic lady. She is gang-banged all too explosively, leaving him with a forlorn bit of rubber dangling from a string, whereupon the dream dolls of London gather overhead to carry him off to the great brothel in the sky... Lamorisse himself could hardly have objected to such an affectionate updating of *The Red Balloon*, which combines the best of Godfrey and Grgic in a surprisingly haunting poetic fantasy.

The two Grand Prix went to Alison de Vere's *Mr. Pascal* and Ishu Patel's *Afterlife*. *Mr. Pascal* is as warm and quirky as one would expect from the director of *Café Bar*, and tells an endearing story of an old shoemaker's night with the figure he helps down from a crucifix. The sheer charm of Alison de Vere's work is unique, and no other film at Annecy married such personal animation to so gentle and wry a narrative. *Afterlife*, a National Film Board of Canada production, explores Milton's claim that 'death is the golden key that opens the palace of eternity' with a dexterous series of melting images of timeless beliefs and myths. Patel's hypnotic visuals are formed in Plasticine on glass, lit from below. The result is utterly absorbing, and grows in stature with every viewing.

Raoul Servais' *Harpya*, excluded from competition since it had already won at Cannes, is by far the most complex of the Belgian director's work. Live action and animation techniques are miraculously integrated to tell the story of a man persecuted by a harpy whose life he has misguidedly saved. Painstaking technical ingenuity won equal admiration for Susan Pitt's *Asparagus*, another film ruled out of competition as a past prizewinner elsewhere. Like *Harpya*, *Asparagus* was assisted with public funding. Three years work and an army of animators have

Bob Godfrey's 'Dream Doll', co-directed with Zlatko Grgic





resulted in an extraordinary erotic allegory involving cel and puppet animation of great complexity. The narrative, though, is often as mysterious as the skill, and while *Asparagus* is impossible not to admire, a first viewing is hardly enough to begin to fathom the director's intentions.

Two British entries deserve special comment—Thalma Goldman's *Stanley*, an alarming erotic nightmare of woman and cat, and *Yellow Submarine Sandwich*, George Parker's 3-minute spoof stuffed with in-jokes at the expense of the feature.

There were many equal pleasures at Annecy '79 and the prizes were exceptionally well chosen; but delegates were left pondering the survival chances of the festival. Not only did the pre-selection committee infuriate Godfrey and Grgic. They chose to reject Bruno Bozzetto's enjoyable *Baby Film* and Robert Breer's dazzling *LMNO*, together with a score or more that richly deserved acceptance. While entire out-of-competition programmes surpass competitive screenings, how seriously can Annecy be regarded?

DEREK HILL

## Super-Eight Independents

Super-eight is by now well established as the major gauge of film stock in regular use for amateur film-making. It has also had considerable use by student film-makers (as distinct from film students, who generally use 16mm, primarily for the reason that their courses were set up at a time when such facilities as editing tables and splicers were not available in 8mm), and those sectors of independent film-making, such as the film co-op movements in Britain and elsewhere, which have not been greatly concerned with obtaining theatrical release.

Nevertheless, it still remains unclear whether super-eight will ever make the transition from amateur to sub-standard professional gauge, as 16mm has done. And the question has recently been highlighted by the showing of three super-eight films at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London: James Nares' *Rome '78*, Don Letts' *Rankin' Movie* and Jenni Wittman's short *Peaches and Cream*. A significant point about these films is that they were not programmed together, as a super-eight mini-season. Nares' film formed part of the 'Cheap Thrills' season of American low-budget work; *Rankin' Movie* of a season entitled 'Britannia Waives the Rules: Empire and Resistance'; while *Peaches and Cream* was one of a programme of three films about 'the way the institution of motherhood has been set up to make sure that women grow up feeling it's safe to be like mother but not safe to be someone in your own right in the world.'

The showings were made possible by the BFI's recent purchase of a Fumeo xenon-arc super-eight projector for use by Regional Film Theatres. Since the difference in picture area between super-eight and 16mm is much less than that between

16mm and 35mm, and present-day 8mm stock tends to be of finer grain than normal 16mm stocks, super-eight can be projected theatrically with comparatively little difference in picture quality from 16mm. In a pre-purchase demonstration the projector lit adequately the screen in NFT 1, an auditorium large enough to be used for 70mm screenings.

The development of such equipment makes an exciting variety of films potentially available to a much wider public. Since 8mm film-making has usually been ultra-low-budget film-making, and little 8mm equipment of professional standard has been available until relatively recently, a recurrent feature of independent super-eight usage has been the development of new solutions to technical problems. Helmut Costard's *Junior Godard*, for example, described the construction of an integrated 8mm sync-sound unit from standard home movie equipment. A cassette tape-recorder and separate microphone were added and the sound-stripe on the filmstrip was used to take a sync pulse. The completed unit was more sophisticated than any 16mm set-up available at the time of its construction.

An equivalent ingenuity was displayed by the founders of the New Cinema, a 50-seat cinema set up in a New York storefront by a group of film-makers including James Nares. The New Cinema uses an Advent video projection screen so that film-makers can shoot on super-eight reversal stock, edit the resultant print and then transfer it to videotape for projection, thus eliminating the cost of both negative and showprint. Short of putting no film in the camera at all (something some structuralist will no doubt get around to before long), I find it difficult to envisage a cheaper way of making films.

*Rome '78*, which was originally made for showing at the New Cinema, is a kind of spoof Roman epic, shot quite overtly in present-day New York (a strategy that has obvious antecedents in Godard's *Alphaville*). The implied symbolic accusation of decadence is not difficult to grasp, but remains on a theoretical level. Whereas Godard's film exposed the elements of Alphaville's authoritarian society in present-day Paris, *Rome '78* merely uses certain 'Roman'-looking parts of New York, such as Grant's Tomb, as a backdrop for its over drawn-out plot. Still, a few scenes stand out: my personal favourite was one shot in the lion house in Central Park Zoo where Caesar, a posturing teenage Caligula figure, rants and raves while a puzzled lion stalks to and fro in the background, clearly utterly baffled by what is going on.

Other New Cinema premières listed by J. Hoberman in a recent *Village Voice* article included Charlie Ahearn's *The Deadly Art of Survival* (a shoestring *Enter the Dragon*), Vivienne Dick's *Beauty Becomes the Beast* ('guerilliere newsreel') and Michael McClard's *Motive* ('Quaalude surrealism'). Whether any of them surfaces in Britain remains to be seen. To date the traffic has been in the opposite direction:

Don Letts' earlier film *Don Letts' Punk Movie* has achieved the distinction of being the first 8mm film to be blown up to 35mm, and is now playing the late-night circuit in the USA.

*Rankin' Movie* has been advertised as 'Don Letts' New Reggae Film'. This is misleading: though the film contains considerable footage of Jamaican reggae acts, this is intercut with vérité material to produce a film whose primary concern is the situation of black youth in Britain. Letts' method of working—shooting on super-eight sound cartridges and editing these without sound overlays, so that every picture cut is accompanied by a sound cut—provides a neat and cheap solution to the danger that the music sequences might prove so absorbing that the rest of the film comes as an irritating interruption. One section stands out: a sequence shot at the 1977 Notting Hill Carnival to which, in a rare use of wildtrack sound, Letts has added a pulsing reggae instrumental. A scuffle breaks out and can be seen escalating into widespread fighting, as the tensions implicit in the music suddenly manifest themselves in reality.

Letts sees the film as being in some ways just a pilot for a future fiction film, *Dread at the Controls*, which he says will be 'a modern Western where the cowboys are dreadlocks and the horses are mini-cabs'—a project which bears an intriguing resemblance, in its reference to Hollywood genre film-making, to the work of both the New Cinema group and earlier generations of American independents.

ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND

## Australia

A major change is under way in the Australian film industry. This has been presaged by the chairman of the Australian Film Commission (AFC), Mr. Ken Watts, when he gave evidence to a Senate committee in

Canberra. He said that the Commission would change its emphasis from helping the development of film-making to one of funding probable box-office successes. 'I think we will move to get the books straight. We will still be looking after the young and developing film-maker, but at the same time we will be making much harsher commercial judgments,' said Watts.

The time of reckoning has come after two years of lavish state funding of films. It has been brought about not by losses sustained on the greater number of films made (a fact of life which is accepted by the AFC), but by the fact that Australian audiences have stopped going to see their own films. Several films have been released in recent months with dismal box-office returns. *The Money Movers* closed after two weeks in Melbourne; *Cathy's Child* and *In Search of Anna* lasted in Sydney a bare four weeks. More than 90 features have come out of Australian studios since 1971, and 16 of those were in the last twelve months. The sheer volume of local production has been too great for the market to bear, and the only film doing well is a road picture, *Mad Max*, made without any government finance, and featuring plenty of violence and car smashes.

A year ago many film-makers decided that the public had had enough of period films and swung heavily into low budget contemporary themes. This has not worked either, and the absence of production values on the screen has not helped to draw people away from their television sets. Australia is now in the middle of a serious economic recession, and the flow of realistic screenplays about contemporary themes seems not to have appealed to a public seeking more in the way of escapist entertainment.

The immediate hopes of the industry rest with two pictures. *My Brilliant Career*, Gill Armstrong's lavishly filmed story of a young woman in 19th century Australia and

'Rome '78'







Otto Preminger on the road in Kenya during the filming of Graham Greene's *'The Human Factor'*

her growing independence, was well received in Cannes, where it was entered in the official competition. It has had more publicity in Australia than any film since *Newsfront* and it is given a fair chance of creating the same box-office appeal. But the best chance for a hit is *Breaker Morant*, produced by the South Australian Film Corporation, directed by Bruce Beresford and starring Edward Woodward and John Waters. It tells the story of a soldier in the Australian army who was shot during the Boer War for mistreating prisoners. At the time of writing, shooting had finished. Those who have seen the rushes are enthusiastic about Beresford's work and the SAFC is confident the film will be included in the official competition at Cannes in 1980. *Breaker Morant* will clearly be the standard bearer for the Australian industry in the coming year.

Notwithstanding some gloom about the industry's prospects, there is still plenty of activity. Pat Lovell, the producer of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, is producing *Monkey Grip*, a sensual love story set in Melbourne, and is working on Peter Weir's projected *Gallipoli*. This latter film promises to be the largest budget film ever made in Australia and has gone to Pat Lovell after the South Australian Corporation pulled out because it was unable to fund the project.

The greatest danger to Australian film-making is the prospect of political support falling away. While the Australian Film Commission, which is funded by the federal government, seems assured of continued support, the state organisations are in a more tenuous position. This is particularly the case in South Australia, which was the pioneering film corporation thanks to the interest of the then state premier in the arts. He was

replaced earlier this year by a man less interested in film-making, and the state corporation is now heavily in debt to its government. There are indications that the present South Australian government may soon tire of continued financial support. Thus *Breaker Morant's* success is crucial.

Australia's smallest state, Tasmania, is now entering film production. It is going ahead with three features, an Aboriginal love story, a comedy (in which Philip Noyce of *Newsfront* is involved), and a children's film. Noyce is also hard at work on a script depicting the dismissal of the Whitlam Labour Government in 1975. So all is far from lost. But now the film-makers are starting to heed the warning signs.

ROBIN BROMBY

## A Matter of Conviction

Of the first 'New Wave' of American film-makers to emerge since the war—the generation of directors who entered the industry via television, and brought with them a variety of new causes and techniques—John Frankenheimer has gone through perhaps the most career transformations. During the 60s, he went from obvious emotional and social commitments to high-octane storytelling. After the uniquely ambitious, overreaching *Seconds*, he seemed to settle into a dull classicism (*The Fixer*, *The Horsemen*), in which size, portentous human content and ponderously academic style bespoke an unhealthy imitation of George Stevens and David Lean.

A continuing lack of financial success was responsible for the most dramatic interruption to Frankenheimer's career after the French-made *Impossible Object* (1972),

which scarcely saw the light of day. Frankenheimer declares himself 'very proud' of that film, and of the fact that he 'bootlegged' a print into the Atlanta Film Festival to win first prize. Now he is pragmatic about future directions: 'I only know what I want to do next—it's a film called *Destiny*, about a Cuban-American family. It takes place mainly in Cuba and Miami in the early 60s, a part of American history that few people know about.'

His most recent film is *Prophecy*, an ecological warning in which a paper mill in the backwoods of Maine is using methyl mercury (which figured in the Minamata scandal in Japan) to soften their wood, and is finally responsible for unleashing mutant forms of animal life. Although Frankenheimer declares 'I always wanted to make a monster movie,' he is sensitive to any suggestion that this is pure fantasy. 'The one thing I really wanted to stay away from was *King Kong*. I didn't want a ninety-foot ape walking down Seventh Avenue. But to me, to have a 14-foot mutation of a bear crashing through the forest is totally believable. That monster had to exist because of something, it couldn't be arbitrary. And David Seltzer, who had so documented everything he did on *The Omen*, had done a lot of research on this whole business of the lumber mills, what they were dumping into the river, and we used it to give validity to this beast. I mean, there have been mutations. I was not just trying to make an irresponsible movie.'

Documentary scene-setting has always figured in Frankenheimer's films: he mentions the meat factory sequence in *Seconds* and how he shot 'Bobby Kennedy's entire political campaign—all his television, all his film. I love doing that. I think I could have been a terrific documentary director.' It explains his greatest dissatisfaction with *Prophecy*, the

first sequence with the hero (Robert Foxworth), a doctor who attends a rat-bitten child in a black ghetto. 'I was talked into shooting it on the back-lot at Paramount. If I had it to do over, I'd go to Washington D.C. and shoot it, which is what I wanted to do in the first place. What really infuriates me about that sequence is that in 1960 I did a movie called *A Matter of Conviction*, which became *The Young Savages*, where the first part took place in the New York slums. And I screamed and yelled to go to New York and shoot it, because I knew New York and I knew I could do it better. For me to have given in on a simple sequence like this bothers me. Every time I've done that in my career it has backfired.' Compromise over the casting of *I Walk the Line* (Frankenheimer wanted Gene Hackman; Columbia insisted on Gregory Peck) prevented that film, he feels, from becoming a 'classic'.

On matters of technique, Frankenheimer maintains that his work has been consistent since his television days. In fact he would seem to have learned his strong sense of composition before entering the movies. 'We had greater possibilities for depth of focus in TV than we had until recently in film, because we never had that fast film. In TV we could do a whole show at f11 or f16, which gives infinite depth of focus.' And the wider screen? 'First of all that Panavision frame was an enemy to me, but little by little I began using the whole frame, not moving the camera much but letting the actors move. You can't get much depth of focus, but you can get terrific lateral movement. Then if you really want the depth of focus, you have to go into dioptics, which I've been doing a lot recently. I like to do terribly complicated shots that don't look complicated to the ordinary viewer.'

RICHARD COMBS

Robert Foxworth, Talia Shire and Armand Assante face the mutants in Frankenheimer's *'Prophecy'*





The man on horseback used to be a general. In complex times, he would ride up like the Duke of Wellington or Andrew Jackson and step from his white horse into the House of Lords or the White House. His presence made difficulties simple. He inspired mass confidence. In his image lay our safety. Now that most western democracies prefer economists to military men, and even in Latin America the general rides up to the presidential palace in a tank, the man on horseback is an actor. His screen role still makes our difficulties seem simple for the moment. His decisions resolve our self-doubts. Usually set back in time, he revives our forgotten wishes for heroes and clear choices. And while his image lasts before and behind our eyes, he is our fantasy leader.

# THE MAN ON HORSEBACK:

## THE SEVEN FACES OF JOHN WAYNE

Andrew Sinclair

*The man on horseback: 'She Wore a Yellow Ribbon'*



For the past forty years, John Wayne has been the most complete man on horseback. His good fortune and ours was to inherit and embody the myth of the *parfait gentil* knight-at-arms with a six-shooter for a sword. Although it may seem a long way from Camelot to Cheyenne and from the Round Table to the chuck waggon, the cowboy was seen in terms of chivalry. As Walter Prescott Webb, the historian of the Great Plains, described him: 'He lives on horseback as do the Bedouins; he fights on horseback, as did the knights of chivalry; he goes armed with a strange new weapon which he uses ambidextrously and precisely; he swears like a trooper, drinks like a fish, wears clothes like an actor, and fights like a devil. He is gracious to ladies, reserved towards strangers, generous to his friends and brutal to his enemies. He is a cowboy, a typical Westerner.'\*

That was the first face of John Wayne. Once John Ford had seen in the unfledged features of the young actor something of the rough grace of the Ringo Kid in *Stagecoach*, he was prepared to bully and cajole a performance out of the wooden Marion Michael 'Duke' Morrison, thirty-two years old and distinguished only by his dogged professionalism. In that highly symbolic and wrought film, Wayne played the cowboy knight-at-arms in his love story with the golden-haired and golden-hearted prostitute Dallas, more of a princess in her behaviour than the ladies riding in the coach with her.

Ford used Wayne's natural ease of movement and shyly vulnerable bulk to suggest the archetype of the western outsider, withdrawn with women and only comfortable in action with men, better than the system and the people who misjudge him. 'Well,' he says to Dallas when they are ostracised at dinner at Dry Fork, 'I guess you can't break out of prison and into society in the same week.' Yet he could break out of the stoneface of his earlier performances—even Raoul Walsh had failed to shift him from his awkwardness as the star of *The Big Trail* in 1930—and he could leap into the cathartic swift grace of the showdown sequence at Lordsburg. As Walker Percy wrote in his novel *The Moviegoer*, other people might treasure climbing the Parthenon at sunrise or meeting a girl on a summer night in Central Park, but his own memorable moment was the time when John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to the dusty street in *Stagecoach*.

What Wayne gave to the Ringo Kid was the violent change of pace and the slow burn of trapped energy in an outlaw, caught between the codes of society and his animal reaction to danger. Unlike Ford's Apaches, who seem to grow like dust-devils out of Monument Valley and typify the wild forces of nature and nemesis, Wayne shows the thin skin of manners which hamper the white man's speed of motion and delicacy of true feeling. When the sheriff finally turns him and Dallas loose after his avenging murders, the sentiment comes from *Huckleberry Finn*. The Ringo Kid and Dallas should be spared the dubious 'blessings of civilisation'. They must live on a frontier where they may act closer to nature and to their own natures.

On that narrow line between the constraint of social behaviour and the explosion of

\*W. P. Webb, *The Great Plains* (Boston, 1931), p. 496.



survival at danger point, Wayne walked delicately. Like a centaur, he always seemed the upper part of any horse he bestrode. But in his boots he always seemed unsure of his ground. 'He walks like a fairy,' William Wellman once said of him. 'He's the only man in the world who can do it.' It was the walk of the loner permanently at risk out of the saddle, waiting for the next threat from his own unkind kind, stalling and teetering until he could sense the danger and blast away our own secret fears with the terrible execution of his carbine or his fist.

There is an evil in the grace of violent action. When murder seems a glory, then might may become a philosophy. Only in a just war can an apology be made for killing other men as a necessary duty. But if that killing is done with the ferocity and style of a beast unleashed, then there is a horrific ambiguity between the pleasure of the sight and the justice of the cause.

Wayne's second face was the face of a war hero in a just war against imperialist fascism. He did not actually fight in the Second World War for reasons never satisfactorily explained. He had had a football accident, a perforated ear-drum and a defective shoulder. He also had a Latin American wife, four children and was technically over age. His efforts to enlist were refused even by Captain John Ford, who had recruited his Field Photographic Branch from Hollywood. So, unable to be a soldier, Wayne played the part.

It began the crippling fracture in his life between the roles and the realities. While Henry Fonda and James Stewart and Ford's other stars were on active service, John Wayne was play-acting the propaganda entertainment films which kept the civilians happy about what their boys were doing abroad. In *Flying Tigers* and *The Fighting Seabees*, Wayne exchanged a saddle for a cockpit and became an aerial cowboy, bucking the clouds like the range and using cannons like carbines. But he could never relate to his acts as John Ford did when he personally filmed the Japanese attack on Midway Island and recorded the flag being run up under shot and shell as if war were a sound stage after all.

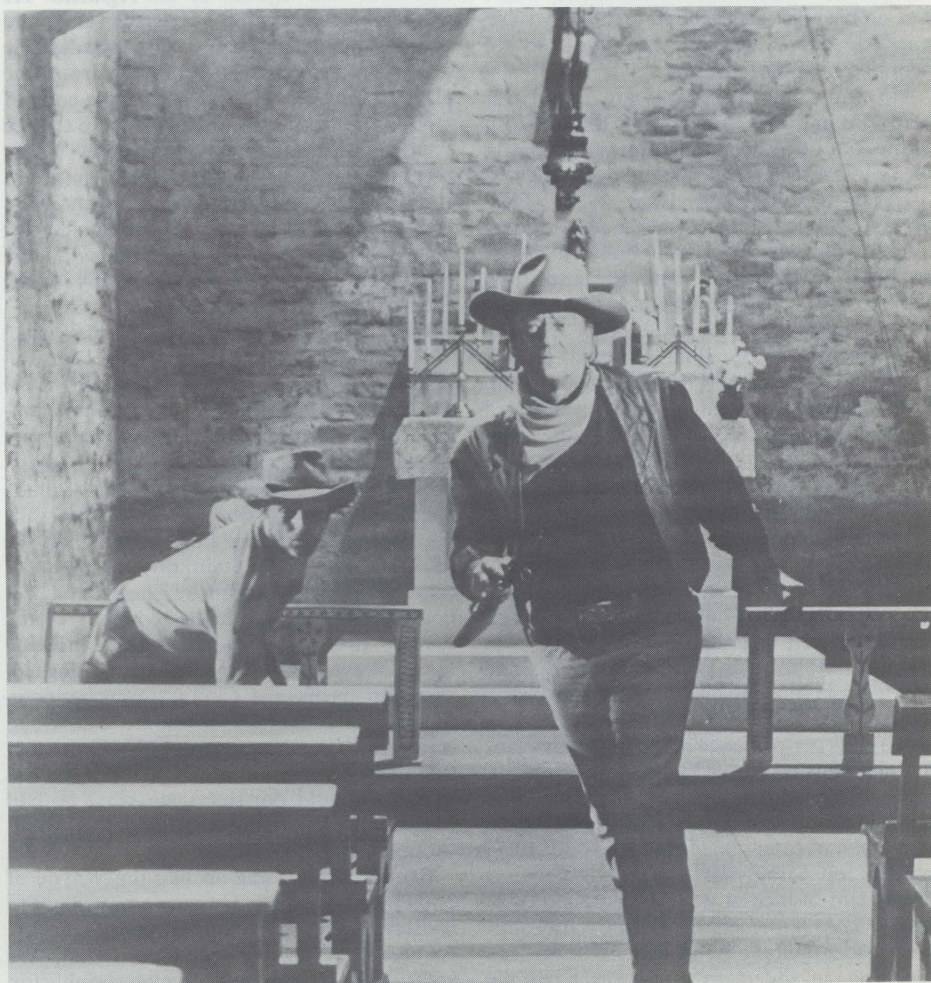
This role of a war hero who had never gone to war changed Wayne as a man, particularly from his experiences while filming *Back to Bataan* and *They Were Expendable*, both released in 1945. The first dealt with the Filipino underground resistance and was directed by Edward Dmytryk, who was later named as a Communist, took the Fifth Amendment, went to jail and ended as a friendly witness before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. Perhaps as a compensation for not serving actively during the war, Wayne was discovering his superpatriotism, which Dmytryk's behaviour on set triggered into a confrontation.

Until that time, like his mentor John Ford, Wayne had voted for Franklin Roosevelt and thought himself a Democrat in the 30s. It was while he was serving on the executive board of the Screen Actors Guild that he began to sense a radical conspiracy in Hollywood, which Dmytryk and his friends seemed to prove by singing the Internationale and making blasphemous jokes to the real fighting American colonel who was the technical adviser on *Back to Bataan*.

'They were driving him up the wall,' Wayne



The hero in action: in 'Big Jim McLain', where he 'used his own company to portray his paranoias' as 'in Howard Hawks' 'El Dorado'







Wayne before Ford: the 'unfledged features of the young actor' in 'Adventure's End' (1937)

said later. He himself went up to Dmytryk and asked him if he was a Communist. And so it surfaced in Wayne, now supersensitive to 'cracks about our President, the flag, God, patriotism—a kind of sneering.' He was ripe fodder to the hard men like his friend Ward Bond, and Cecil B. DeMille and Adolphe Menjou. He became a figurehead of the reactionary anti-Communist group that was to destroy their fellow workers in the days of McCarthy and drive them from Hollywood. To the end of his life, Wayne remained unrepentant about this victimisation. There was no blacklist, he declared—'the only thing our side did... was just running a lot of people out of the business.'

He was acting like a cowboy, like a war hero, running a lot of people off the land, out of life, out of business. No more than that in the simple screen terms that did not apply to a complex postwar and Cold War world. Wayne's hidden sense of shame at not going to war was portrayed in a bullying *macho* political position that was the campaign ribbon on his costume uniform. That shame was increased when he had to play with the much-decorated PT Boat Captain Robert Montgomery in *They Were Expendable*, John Ford's ultimate statement about war based on the true exploits of Commander John Bulkeley during the retreat from the Philippines. The fact that Montgomery and Ford and the crippled screenwriter 'Spig' Wead had been seconded from active duty to make the film was intolerable to Wayne, who actually burst into tears in front of them because he was the only one not in uniform. The additional fact that a theme in the film was the 'betrayal' at Pearl Harbour made Wayne even more suspicious of a conspiracy undermining the defences of America.

Wayne's performance in the final version of the film showed his growing maturity as an actor, in contrast with his immaturity as a political figurehead. His playing of Lt. Ryan is a model of tough obedience and controlled compassion within the comradeship that is the cement of men at war. In his remarkable book, *The Warriors*, J. Glenn Gray has described a military man's delight in war as a spectacle, in the energy of danger, in the

pleasure of watching destruction, and in the virtue of self-sacrifice for the group. Ford directed and Wayne portrayed all these warrior themes in *They Were Expendable*, which is simply the best American film yet made about the Second World War.

The third and most enduring face of John Wayne was created by Ford in the postwar years. It was the role of the enduring professional, true to his code and silent about the values which he acts out. In the first of Ford's trilogy about the US Cavalry, *Fort Apache*, Wayne plays the seasoned and hardened second-in-command to the fool-hardy and stubborn martinet, Colonel Thursday, played by Henry Fonda. In this recreation of the disaster at the Little Big Horn against the Sioux, Ford was unconsciously wounding Wayne in his emphasis of the gap between the military fact and the military legend. Wayne's role as Captain Kirby York made him the professional and seasoned soldier on permanent active duty, while Fonda played the dreamer of glory back from ceremonial missions and damned if he would not make a name for himself. In fact, in the real fighting, it had been the other way round. But it is Wayne, one of the few survivors of the massacre, who has to accept the legend of Fonda's heroism because it is good for morale and makes better soldiers of the new cavalymen, whom he must lead to victory as a professional in the third film of the trilogy, *Rio Grande*.

S. E. Finer, who wrote the definitive book on the role of the military in politics, *The Man on Horseback*, once defined the way in which a soldier became a professional. The newcomer was instructed in the history and traditions and legends of his regiment. He was segregated in camp or barracks and wore a common uniform with his comrades. He was a systematic nomad, moving from one place to another. He had a separate code of morals and manners from civilians, so that he even had to ask permission to marry. So he became totally self-centred and self-sufficient except when commanded by his authorities. His contempt was for those outside his regiment, the 'civvies', the *bourgeois*, the politicians. His respect was often only for the enemy, if he fought well.

In his new cavalry and 'political' role, Wayne was the essence of Finer's soldier and man on horseback. He was graduating from the cowboy's individualist and anarchic defiance of authority to the professional's wily obedience and unsung defence of authority. He had played the role of the rough self-made aged slugging rancher so well in Howard Hawks' *Red River* that Ford offered him the lead as the old Captain on the point of retirement, Nathan Brittles, fighting a last holding campaign with the remnants of the cavalry after the massacre at the Little Big Horn. Wayne played the role of the dogged, wise and pacific old Captain even better in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and Ford gave him a cake with one candle to celebrate the fact that he had become a mature actor in the last year. He would not say again what he had told Jean Renoir on his arrival in Hollywood, 'Actors are crap.'

Brittles is not gung-ho like the Wayne of *The Fighting Seabees*. He is determined not to fight, but to survive against a superior enemy. As he says to his ancient Indian friend, 'We are too old for war. But old men should stop

Wars.' And he does stop a new outbreak of war by a ruse, stampeding the horses of the young Indians, his wise trickery superior to Colonel Thursday's insane bravery.

So Wayne showed through Ford's direction his maturity as an actor, some of which was reaching through to the man. He had learned, above all, to project that quality which particularly distinguished his performances—a sincerity almost painful in its naturalness. Of course, Ford had again had a hand in this when he made him replay a favourite scene of a man in doubt talking to the gravestone of his dead wife. 'Duke,' he had said, 'you're going to get a lot of scenes during your life. They're going to seem corny to you. Play 'em. Play 'em to the hilt. If it's East Lynne, play it. You'll get by with it, but if you start trying to play it with your tongue in your cheek and getting cute, you'll lose sight of yourself.'

And that is how Wayne always played it in inferior pictures with worse directors in his days of bad choices in the 50s. Through his style and apparent sincerity, he would try to impose himself on terrible material, although the cost to his reputation was great. His fourth face was, indeed, his most honest and most misguided, for the man on horseback should hardly open his mouth and never leave his seat. When Wayne actually came out with direct patriotic and political statements, the naiveté of his views dropped his sincerity into bathos.

In probably the worst film he ever made, *Big Jim McLain* of 1952, he used his own company to portray his paranoias. The plot was thin, dealing with a Communist group on the Hawaiian islands, and Wayne indulged in an open witch-hunt by showing the wrecked American fleet at Pearl Harbour and suggesting that this was proof of the need for eternal vigilance against internal subversion.

Such a sad and inept piece of propaganda should never have been undertaken by Wayne. If he had to display his support of the military virtues, he did it better under his second face of the war hero. In *Sands of Iwo Jima*, Wayne played the savage and ruthless Sergeant Stryker, who bullies his recruits into killers and leads them in an uphill charge against the Japanese, only to die casually as the flag is raised on the summit of Mount Suribachi to the triumphant notes of the Marine Hymn. No American boy could fail to cheer and drop a tear at such a stirring sight—and the enemy was still 'bad', the villains of the Second World War.

The film was actually the inspiration for many of the young Americans who were to serve in Vietnam. Only the enemy had become different—still small and yellow, but perhaps fighting in a good national cause against a foreign invader. Wayne did not think so. In his role as a 'political' warrior, he suggested a film on *The Green Berets* to President Lyndon Johnson, who approved the idea until the script proved too crass and bloody even for that hawklike administration.

Wayne went ahead anyway, making the Viet Cong bite the bullet even faster than the Indians in his early B-westerns. He ignored the fact that the young people of America were alienated from the war. He was applying the values of the Western and the just war to an intervention that many thought eastern and unjust. When the film was released in



1968 at the height of the protest against the war, it disgusted most of the liberal and radical opinion which Wayne despised—and made more money at the box-office than any Wayne picture to that date.

So Wayne was to prove his point, that there was an audience in the American heartland for the aggressive all-American man of action, who would blow to bits anybody who opposed his flag. It was a brutal way to solve all doubts. He had begun to make many of his films through his own production company, although he was nearly ruined by the largest of his productions, *The Alamo*, in which he played Davy Crockett in coonskin cap and all. It was a failed extravaganza in which he once again showed a secret face—a sympathy for the Mexicans and for their cause.

In his private life, he was to marry three Spanish-American women and sire many children and grandchildren. Despite his apparent embodiment of the Anglo-Saxon myth of superiority and dominance, he had the Border fantasy about the women of the South, somehow forbidden, somehow sweeter, somehow more animal, that he showed in his understanding of the scene of his greatest compassion, when the racist Ethan Edwards finally takes the 'tainted' Natalie Wood in his arms in *The Searchers*. Wayne was a man capable of hidden passion and eroticism, which Ford once more revealed in him.

For in Ford's most humorous and Irish film, *The Quiet Man* of 1952, the master director had brought out Wayne's fifth face, the self-mocking violent man who appreciates his own huge image, not playing tongue in cheek, but grinning as he lashes out. It is also Wayne's most erotic role with Maureen O'Hara—ever since the Armada wrecks, the Irish were meant to have Spanish blood in them. Barry Fitzgerald was right when he commented on the broken marriage bed, 'Homeric'. There is Homer in the humour of this film about an Irish village that never quite was like that. All is larger than life and the stuff that legends are made of.

Howard Hawks, still working with the ageing Wayne, found that he was losing his grace of action. He was no longer like a big cat, but a heavy man who sat like a sack on his horse. But as Wayne lost the beauty of swift movement, he acquired a distance from his performance. He relaxed into his own weathering, until he could at last act wholly his most comic role, Rooster Cogburn in *True Grit*, and win his only Oscar for such a wry and robust performance, a man with a patch over one eye, slouching on his big horse like a sagging Colossus.

His sixth face was an awesome one, the most telling of them all. In John Ford's last two major Westerns, *The Searchers* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Wayne plays the role of the legendary Greek hero, who has to face up to death, to seek the answer to its riddle, and to survive or die alone. As Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers*, Wayne arrives as an implacable avenger seen through the little door of a homely cabin. He searches for a kidnapped girl for twenty years, true to his oath and as inevitable as nemesis. When he regains her after trial by battle, he cannot touch her until redeemed by a shaft of mercy as unexpected as an Indian arrow. Then he must go away and live on alone, unfit as he is

for human society. As Aristotle once wrote, there are rare and superior men so large that they must live apart like gods or wild beasts.

*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* begins with Wayne already in his coffin. The film is the revelation of his relationship with James Stewart, who took away his woman and depended falsely for his reputation on Wayne's cold-blooded killing of a hired gunman. In his final angry speech to Stewart, Wayne shouts out that he will take the responsibility for the murder. He is a loner of the frontier, where action takes the place of moral doubt. So he will die alone, while Stewart will marry and breed and make the wilderness sprout like a cornfield. His time is done and Stewart's is come. The film is a bare epitaph and a requiem for the passing of the great days of the west and for those who died in the passing.

Both of these masterworks have added poignancy because Ford and Wayne both fought against cancer in the last years of their lives. Ford's fight was as heroic and unsung as Nathan Brittles' campaign, but Wayne's had to be public. He often boasted in his way of 'licking the Big C' until it finally ate him away. He was magnificent in his going down, his last and seventh face the noblest of them all, the features of true grit which he insisted on showing to disguise his suffering. Even his last work advertising a savings and loan institution showed his total authority. Yes, one could believe one's money was safe if the old heavy man on horseback said so. It was impossible that such a brave man could be wrong. He seemed to know it all and endure it all. So it must be so.

Of the seven faces of John Wayne, five will endure as long as his image is shown on our screens. He will always be to our eyes the outlaw as Galahad, the just war hero, the professional soldier, the wry and robust man of violence, and the mythic figure brave and lasting unto death. One face will disappear in the witch-hunts of yesterday, which in a few

centuries will seem no more real than Salem. And the final private face of the man who learned courage and some grace of speech by imposing his many good roles on his manners should not be forgotten. I will always remember the honour and dignity of his last 'political' speech during President Carter's inauguration, when he praised the occasion and declared himself a member of the 'loyal opposition'.

Finally, the image abides, while politics subside. Wayne had a young grace of action, a middle-aged authority, an old man's mythic quality that will transcend his reactionary beliefs, although it will never deny them. The image is finally greater than the man, which is the mystery of a true star. His good luck was to have John Ford to teach him how to picture the messages of the roles he played. If Ford was not his Svengali, he was his example, until Wayne could at last match off-screen his master's compassionate strength.

Ford did not live long enough to see the deep values he cherished become popular again. Wayne did, so that his more simple faiths launched a serious movement to name Los Angeles airport after him. The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the rise of Russian military power has made patriotism fashionable again and liberalism appear to be appeasement. Forgetfulness of the horrors of the Vietnamese intervention, and the present sufferings of the boat people, have made Wayne's reactionary integrity seem attractive as an answer to weak leadership in shifting times.

*The Deer Hunter* is, after all, something of a cross between *The Searchers* and *The Green Berets*, as profound as the first, as extreme as the second. It confirms Wayne's image that now grows larger, the man on horseback whose blunt brief truths and actions appear to solve all, to save all. He is a dangerous hero for dangerous times, and only a wrought one, even less real than General Boulanger. Yet sometimes he seems to be all that we have got.

'Horse Soldiers': 'the seasoned soldier on permanent active duty'







Left: the 'Twist as primal scene'.  
Below: Joe (Mathew Brady) 'returns'  
to the villa of the prologue

# BERTOLUCCI

## on *La Luna*



*La Luna*, Bernardo Bertolucci's first film since 1900, was one of the major Italian entries at the Venice Festival held at the end of August—the first Venice Festival since 1972. *La Luna*, which was produced by 20th Century-Fox, is likely to be seen in London early in 1980. This interview took place in the summer, when Bertolucci was still working on the film.

### Richard Roud

**BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI:** The idea of *La Luna* came two years ago during a session with my psychoanalyst. I suddenly realised that I had been talking about my father for seven or eight years—and now I wanted to talk about my mother. And my first memory of her—I was maybe two—was of me sitting in a little basket on her bicycle, facing her. We were in the country near Parma, and suddenly I saw the moon in the evening sky. And there was a

confusion in my mind between the image of the moon and that of my mother's face. This image stopped me dead in my tracks. I couldn't get behind it and I couldn't let it go. So I thought that it was a point of departure for a film. And the film began from that image.

*What surprised and excited me was the change in style from your previous films. It's more direct because it's less 'psychological' and*

*much more existential. It's as if you had made The Conformist but put the 'explanatory' sequence with the chauffeur at the end of the movie, not at the beginning.*

Yes, I always used to give the 'key' from the start; here it's the reverse. I guess that's what we'll have to call the 'New Dramaturgy'. I think that *La Luna* resembles *Breathless* more than any other film. *Breathless* was made twenty years ago (my God—twenty years ago!) but they are similar in their freedom.

*Breathless had a very close relationship with a certain American cinema and La Luna is also much more American than your other films. It reminds me of the great period of the American cinema when everything was there in the film, but it was never explained. Like those American novels the French discovered just before and after World War II in which there was no psychological commentary—just a presentation of facts, events or things.*

That's true. For a long time I used to present a situation and at the same time make a commentary on the situation and analyse it.

*Is that why there are very few set-pieces in the film?*

One can't go on doing the same thing all the time; it gets boring. But when you see the film a second time, I think you'll notice that there are some bravura sequences, but they are more subtle, more discreet. There are some sequence shots, for example, but I cut in the middle of them. Then I take them up a little later, but in such a way that you don't realise that it is the continuation of the same shot. I think that generally I tried to substitute feeling for the usual narcissism of the camerawork. The camera movements are not so long, not so showy. Because I was too involved with the sentiments of the film—the mother-child story, the father, the father-mother-child trinity—there was less room for my usual exhibitionism. Of course the opera scenes are spectacular.

*The first prologue takes place in a house by a very Mediterranean sea. There are four characters in this sequence: a mother (Jill Clayburgh) and her child, a man, and an older woman (Alida Valli).*

The film begins with the child who takes a biscuit and some honey: he spills the honey on his leg. That's why I like to call the film *mielodrama*! [*Miele* is Italian for honey.] The mother licks it off. Then she takes her own finger with the honey still sticking to it and offers it to the child: he sucks it off her finger. What's important to me in the prologue is that we witness the moment of passage from the mother-child symbiosis which lasts during the whole breast-feeding period up until the moment of individuation which, according to Freudian theory, occurs when the child sees—or imagines he sees—what Freud called the primal scene: the mother and father making love. In *La Luna*, the primal scene is the Twist danced by the mother and a man we cannot clearly see. I didn't want to identify the man for two reasons: first of all, I didn't want the audience to know who the boy's father was, and secondly because the first image the child has of his father is often that of a stranger, one who is necessary to break up the closed circle of the mother-child symbiosis. This



'twist-as-primal-scene' is important because from this moment on the Oedipal process begins. And it's the only way the child can realise he is not a *part* of his mother.

*One thing seems strange to me in this scene: why is there a large looking-glass leaning against the wall of the verandah? It reminded me of the title of Auden's long poem The Sea and the Mirror.*

A house by the sea is usually furnished in a provisional manner, and I thought it would be beautiful to see the sea and the mother [*la mer et la mère*] reflected in the mirror. But it was also a little homage to Lacan and his views on the importance of the child's first recognition of himself in a mirror. I don't want people to think the film is a psychoanalytical dictionary. It's just that psychoanalysis is a possible key to an interpretation of the film.

*Then it's not too fanciful to see the unrolling of the ball of wool as standing in some way for the umbilical cord?*

No, that was intentional.

*The prologue ends with an evocation of your childhood memory: the mother pedalling along on her bike in the early evening. The next sequence—the second prologue, as it were—occurs many years later, in New York. The Jill Clayburgh character is an opera singer: born Catherine Silvers, her stage name is Caterina Silveri, and she is packing for a European trip. Her 14-year-old son Joe (Mathew Brady) wants to help her and he also wants to go to Europe with his parents. 'I can do everything,' he says, 'the contracts, the hotel reservations.' But she answers, 'Your father does that.' 'But I could do it better,' he retorts. To no avail. 'No, no, you must go on with your schooling.' And then Joe skips out to find his father and proposes to him that he stay in New York with him. Of course he succeeds no better with his father than he had with his mother.*

*And then comes the E. M. Forster-like sudden death of the father: he has gone out to get the car, but he has a heart attack and he doesn't come back. At the funeral, Caterina suddenly suggests to Joe that he come with her to Europe...*

As long as Douglas, her husband, is alive, she insists on Joe's need to go on at school. The minute he's dead, she suddenly discovers that there are plenty of schools in Italy! Joe naturally feels like an object that his mother does what she wants with. She is a singer who is at the beginning of her career, and I think that Douglas is a paternal figure for her, too. He's both her impresario and her agent. He's the one who takes care of Caterina, and in fact he's more of a father for her than for Joe.

*The film proper begins in Rome—but again it's a different Rome from the one we usually see.*

Yes. Joe is completely uprooted, and I tried to underline that by showing Rome as a city of the Middle East—an exotic, colonial city. That's why the usher in the movie theatre in the Piazza Cavour is an Arab, and that's why the bits of Rome we see are not the usual ones.

*The first we see of Rome is the Piazza Cavour with kids skate-boarding, and Joe arriving with his girl friend Arianna (the name is not accidental: she does provide in some degree the thread to guide Joe through the Roman labyrinth) and another boy friend of hers. Joe and Arianna go in to see the movie,*

Niagara. *Why did you choose that film?*

First because there's all that water, which reminded me of the sea at the beginning of the film, but mostly because of Marilyn Monroe, who for me is an image of Woman, like the Madonna, the mother.

*Who never had any children herself.*

Right. And I think she's one of the most poetic things in all cinema. Furthermore, she's a mother in the film.

*It's a very puzzling sequence. Before going into the auditorium, they both go into the men's room. But why? At first I thought it was to have sex, but later inside the auditorium she says she is a virgin, and he replies, me too. So what did they do?*

Perhaps a fix, but it's not clear. I want the audience to think it's a love scene, but afterwards I want to disquiet them with the scene in which they both admit they're virgins.

*Joe then goes to find his mother at the opera where she is singing Leonora in Il Trovatore. The scene is the one in which Leonora mistakes the Count di Luna (!) for her lover Manrico. Why did you choose this scene?*

I don't know why Verdi and his librettist Cammarano wrote that scene. It's like the equivocal comedies of Shakespeare where one character turns out to be another, but here I think we have two father figures. Furthermore, as we eventually discover, Manrico and the Count are in fact brothers, so they're in a sense the same man, but split in two. Perhaps I chose this scene to prefigure the discovery that Caterina has had two husbands, two lovers.

*After the performance, Joe goes backstage and hears Caterina's friend Marina (Veronica Lazar) say: 'She sings better since her husband died.' This is the eve of Joe's fifteenth birthday and he also hears his mother say, 'If Joe stopped growing, I wouldn't be so old.' Then comes the birthday party the next day. During it Joe disappears into another room to shoot up. Initially it comes as a shock to realise that Joe is a junkie, although looking back one sees the signs that had been planted.*

*I particularly liked the cut from him 'shooting up' to the arrival of the birthday cake. She thinks of him as a kid who still gets turned on by cakes, but we know he needs stronger stuff!*

That is a little joke. There are the Nouvelles Philosophes and the Nouvelle Cuisine, and in this film I wanted, as I said, to create a New Dramaturgy. It's what I've always done in my films—the contrary of what is called consistency in English. I really like to play on contrasts: there are a lot of them in 1900. There are a lot in Shakespeare too. The English talk about consistency, but thank God they don't keep to it in their literature. Life isn't consistent. You can (and should) have consistency in the structure of a film, a play, or a novel. But one must avoid consistency if one is to portray the sudden contradictions which we find in life.

*I very much liked the sequence that follows: Joe running away from the party with Caterina in pursuit. It ends up in the Piazza Farnese—the drug centre of Rome. Was it done with a hand-held camera?*

No, it's the first time I used this American thing called Steadycam; it was first used in Rocky, but now everyone uses it. I like it

because it's not a dolly-track, and it's not hand-held. It's something between the two, and there's no jiggling.

*They return to their flat, and the scene that follows is arguably the centre of the film: the first real confrontation between Joe and his mother. She turns on him: 'When I look at you and your friends, I think I'm on Mars.' They even start hitting each other. Joe escapes to his room to turn on. Then he sneaks out and the next sequence shows him wandering round Rome. With a piece of chalk, he marks out his itinerary by tracing a line on the walls.*

The whole film is a kind of labyrinth. There is probably a connection between the umbilical cord (the unravelling ball of wool in the prologue), the chalk and the Ariadne thread.

*In the Zanzibar café Franco Citti tries to pick him up. He buys him an ice-cream cone which Joe sensuously licks: they dance together, but then Joe falls asleep. When he finally comes home, his first words to Caterina are: 'I really miss dad, and you don't.' Then he passes out. After the doctor has left, Caterina decides to go out.*

She puts on his clothes. The clothes stand for his skin. And where does she go? Well, she wants to understand Joe. So she goes back to the Piazza Farnese because she remembers that he knows someone there. She doesn't know what she'll find, but she goes anyhow. And there's nobody there. Suddenly, like an elf, there appears Mustafa, Joe's friend and dealer.

*And at that moment, the film takes off on to a new level. There's something quite literally fantastic in that sequence with Mustafa.*

A lot of people have told me that the sequence is too long, etc. Others think Mustafa is extraneous to the main subject, and that he should be cut. But he is the first person who enables her to begin to understand Joe. Above all, that's because he's *not* her son. After Mustafa she is no longer a Martian. She starts to enter into her son's world. Already she has decided to give up her career. Before, she was a kind of middle-class mother who was trying to understand 'modern youth'; from the moment she decides to stop singing, we realise it is because she feels that her son's loneliness has been caused by her career. Until she meets Mustafa it was a drama of non-interaction; after Mustafa the interaction begins. And it's only then that there is the first erotic incident between her and her son. So when she leaves Mustafa (who has forced a gift upon her—some heroin) she comes home with the feeling that she now understands Joe better. She has decided to take off her maternal mask. When she gets home, she finds Joe preparing a fancy dinner for her. What's paradoxical is that he indicates his need for being nourished by her by preparing a meal for her. I think heroin has become a substitute for the nourishment he hasn't had from his mother.

The sequence which begins as comedy ends in drama. 'Do you know why I take dope?' he asks. 'Because I don't give a shit.' 'About me?' she asks. 'About anything,' he answers. Like a lot of mothers, mistresses or wives, the minute she hears the other say I'm unhappy, her immediate and egotistical response is that it must be because of her. By this time he needs another fix, badly. And she does the only possible thing. She goes to her room and





Caterina (Jill Clayburgh) stranded on the road after Joe drives off and leaves her; an incident just before the Renato Salvatori episode

takes the package Mustafa has given her, saying, 'Take it, Joe will need it.' She never thought she would give it to him; she just took it because it was placed in her hand. But she begins to nourish Joe by giving him the heroin. She hasn't got a needle, and neither has he. So Joe takes a fork and sticks it into his arm. A desperate gesture. Once Caterina has accepted his need for dope, this leads naturally to her trying to compensate for his inability to take the heroin by 'suckling' him at her breast. [Both of them are fully dressed.]

But after he 'suckles' on her breast, he guides her hand towards his genitals.

Yes, he does take her hand, but she accepts: she begins to massage him through his clothes. It's the ultimate, the extreme maternal gesture.

After he comes, he falls asleep completely

At the rehearsal at the Baths of Caracalla: Joe (Mathew Brady) has just been slapped by his father (Tomas Milian)



I wasn't sure the old man even recognised Caterina. Why does he put on 'Soave sia il vento' (from *Così fan tutte*) on the gramophone?

Because it was something she used to sing, and it's a heavenly melody. It's not Verdian, it's neither passionate nor romantic. It's elegiac, sublime. It's about everything that's been going on in her life.

What is the building that Joe (who has followed his mother to Parma) and Caterina walk past together, talking, but separated by the colonnade?

That's the Teatro Regia, the opera house. That was where she sang her first *Traviata*: 'It was snowing outside and I was throwing up on my costume because I was so nervous, so I had to wear it inside out on stage.' But I'm thinking of cutting all that in the final print.

Then she says, 'When I found out I was pregnant, your father fainted.' And Joe asks her if she will ever remarry. She doesn't answer, and they try to get into the theatre, but it's closed. Then they go off to the country to show Joe their old house. They get to a level crossing and have to wait until the train comes through. And the sequence that follows is the one I find the most uncomfortable. Caterina kisses Joe for no apparent reason.

She has just said that his father first kissed her here at this level crossing.

Yes, but that's no reason for her to kiss him. And she kisses him as one kisses a lover. Earlier it was the mother who was helping the son. But here, I don't quite understand it myself. I guess it's the New Dramaturgy!

Then there follows the scene of them looking for—and finally finding—Verdi's home at Sant' Agata. And the strange and, to me, not wholly relevant sequence when she is picked up by Renato Salvatori and flirts with him. Then she gets rid of Salvatori, and says to Joe: I didn't want to touch him, I wanted to be touching you. Does she really mean that?

I think that scene has to be improved a little. But she does, I think, want Joe in some way, although when they go into the bedroom behind the café and he tells her he's scared, she admits to being scared too. The real point of this sequence is that she doesn't know how to tell Joe who his real father was. 'If only we could have found the house, it would have been easier . . . I could have told you . . . the house where I lived with your real father, not Douglas.'

So finally the truth is out, and we realise that the man in the prologue must not have been Douglas, but someone else. Who? And why has she not told Joe sooner?

That happens quite often in middle-class families. But there's another reason, too, that we only discover at the end of the film. Something very traumatic, obviously, happened between Caterina and Giuseppe (Tomas Milian), her first lover. Joe's father was not an adult. He was a man who lived with his mother (Alida Valli).

In Rome, we and Joe find Giuseppe teaching in a school. It's paradoxical that someone who has abandoned his own son has surrounded himself with children. And Joe is even a little jealous. But he does not reveal himself yet. He hangs around, and even manages to exchange clothes with Giuseppe: he takes his father's shoes and leaves his own. They both have white jackets. It's like Brando



and Massimo Girotti in *Tango* wearing the same bathrobe.

Joe follows Giuseppe [Giuseppe and Joseph are of course the same name] surreptitiously and this leads him to the sea near Rome. And one realises that this is where the prologue took place. Then Joe asks Giuseppe if he ever wondered what happened to his son. 'Where is he?' asks Giuseppe. 'Dead,' says Joe. 'He died in front of my house of an overdose.' Alida Valli is cryptically strumming Debussy on the piano, but stops to ask Joe where Caterina is. 'At the rehearsal at Caracalla.' Then Giuseppe asks Joe to leave. Does Joe remember his father?

No, he was only a year old, but he does know that there was something missing from his life. He says that he, Joe, is dead, because...

Because in order for there to be a resurrection there has to be a death?

Exactly.

The final sequence takes place in the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla where outdoor opera is given every summer in Rome. It is afternoon, and they are rehearsing Act 4 of *A Masked Ball*. Why this particular opera and scene?

Because we have a woman between two men, and one of the two is killed. She (Amelia) is veiled; and she is trying to hide herself.

Caterina, we discover, is so upset she cannot sing her role at the rehearsal. When she sees Joe, she asks for a five minute break.

Yes, and then she dries his tears, and he dries hers. And then he takes the veil from her. She says, 'Now you're in love with your father!'

That was very funny because she says it with a particularly New York accent. First you were in love with me, and now you're in love with him. Where will it all end?

When Joe asks why she left his father, she tells him that Giuseppe was selfish; he hated her voice; he wanted something different. He was in love with his mother, too. Then Arianna arrives.

It's like the end of an opera when all the characters are on stage. You don't know any more whether the action is taking place on the stage or in the audience. I like the scene where Caterina, in effect, gives Joe back to his father. And then—smack!—the father slaps Joe's face. And then a few minutes later, he turns around, sees Joe sitting with Arianna, and gives him a little smile, as if to say, why did you make me suffer, why did you make me feel guilty? I am guilty, of course, but not of your death.

Joe has finally found his identity. There's no question of him going to live with Giuseppe, and the parents don't come together again, because Giuseppe is still in love with his own mother.

What are the last words she sings?

Ei muore: he's dying.

Who's dying?

Joe... I wanted to say the obvious: that every man is in love with his mother. And then, that Joe has now become an adult. The boy is dead. The adult has killed him. He had to die to live. You know, 'Except a grain of wheat fall to the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit.'

# The Other Bertolucci

David Overbey

As if in some real life flashback, there again was Renato Salvatori walking through Milan's Stazione Centrale as he had done nineteen years ago in Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*. Well, not quite in exactly the same way: he is now playing the supporting role of a middle-class husband far removed from his vanquished peasant in *Rocco*. The new film is *Una Donna Italiana* (An Italian Woman), directed by Giuseppe Bertolucci, produced by his cousin Giovanni Bertolucci (for 20th Century-Fox), and 'presented' by his brother Bernardo. Like his older brother, 32-year-old Giuseppe is a published poet and began making films in his twenties. He has directed a number of television documentaries, including the widely seen *Abicinema* about the filming of 1900, and in 1976 a feature film, *Berlinguer, ti voglio bene*, a political satire about a Tuscan peasant's admiration for the leader of the Italian Communist Party, which launched Roberto Benigni, now a popular television comedian. Giuseppe has also worked closely with his brother from the beginning, as assistant director on *Spider's Stratagem* and as an active collaborator on the scripts of *Last Tango in Paris*, 1900 and *La Luna*.

Although everyone was more than willing to talk about what happens in *An Italian Woman*, and even to show one the script, no one seemed willing, or able, to summarise the plot. The director simply says, indeed: 'There is no plot as such. A woman misses the train on which she is supposed to go on holiday with her husband, her child and her lover. She meets a stranger, whom she finally recognises as someone she used to love when a child. The two of them never leave the station, and have a series of encounters with others and confrontations between themselves. She gains a clearer look at herself. It's a film of growing awareness rather than of plot in the usual sense.' Bertolucci also insists that the station itself is a major character rather than just a setting: 'It has a thousand eyes, mouths, arms, and in it everything is possible. It is the most purely European of Italian stations, so that there are continual encounters with other cultures, other ways of seeing things.'

Bertolucci has used the entire station, with its sweeping twin staircases, vaulted cupola, labyrinthine subterranean passages and seedy waiting rooms, as well as real porters, conductors and a good many of the 'marginal' characters who actually seem to live in the station. The authorities have turned the station over to the film company, with only the restriction that filming should not begin until late evening and must end towards dawn, which pleased Bertolucci a good deal 'since those hours are perfect for the atmosphere we need.'

The railway's co-operation is complete:

clocks are constantly reset so that scenes shot on different days will match, and loudspeakers in the area of shooting are either turned off or give information quite unrelated to the real movement of trains. The crowds that gather to watch the film crew often find themselves being 'directed' by assistant director Gabriele Polverosi as part of the background. 'We've had a few complaints about people missing trains because of the loudspeakers and clocks, but mostly missed trains are due to people gladly participating in take after take.'

Bertolucci is shooting in direct sound, almost unheard of in the Italian cinema in which post-synchronisation has become an industry in itself. What is even more startling is that calls for quiet (or for 'background noise' at a certain level) are obeyed quickly and with good humour. Part of that general good humour on the set comes, according to the director, 'Because this is really a collaboration. We have a script and I have certain clear ideas of what I want, but everyone has a voice in what we are doing. Late each afternoon everyone can come to see the rushes and there we will discuss everything.' Bruno Ganz, who is playing Werner, 'the stranger', agrees. 'Giuseppe listens. At first I didn't like the script, but we talked about it a lot and came to an understanding about what we were doing. I didn't write a word, but part of that script is me.'

One long evening which involved a complicated choreography of a number of actors and a constantly moving camera, in which the action took place throughout the second-class waiting room, was made even longer by discussions between each take. Ganz would go off into a corner to think, come back to whisper with Mariangela Melato (who plays the wife), and then take Bertolucci aside. After such conversations the action would change subtly. At first, for example, Ganz drew a pistol in almost gangster-film style when threatened by two thugs; after a discussion he began merely to present the gun to view, to show he had it rather than suggest he wanted to use it. Although the film is being shot in Italian, at one point Ganz walks along in front of a receding camera and mumbles a few lines of Hölderlin in German. When asked about it later, Bertolucci said 'That was Bruno's idea. At that point the character is alone, thinking about death, and is nearly mad. Bruno pointed out quite rightly that Werner would speak to himself in German, and since he had exactly the right lines from Hölderlin to speak, we did it like that.'

In spite of the hour (three in the afternoon, the shooting having gone on through the night until ten that morning), Bertolucci was





'An Italian Woman': Bruno Ganz and Mariangela Melato

as full of energy when he arrived for our first full conversation as he had been the previous evening when he started work.

**Did the combination of the Milan station and Salvatori bring to mind *Rocco* to you, as it did to me? I know you admire Visconti.**

GIUSEPPE BERTOLUCCI: I admire everything except the last Visconti films, which seem to me to be tired. You can tell: he used the zoom much more often instead of tracking. Yes, I thought of *Rocco*. I'm glad that came to your mind instead of *Stazione Terminale*, which I've been asked about because that takes place in the Rome station. I hope that film is the opposite of mine. It began De Sica's real descent, and I hope mine begins my ascent.

**I've heard you mention *An Italian Woman* as a 'political' film. In what sense?**

The theme of the film is repression. The woman has accepted all relationships, with her mother, her child, her husband, her lover, as givens. At the station she meets someone who shocks her into an awareness of who she is and what she really wants, into an awareness of reality. The mechanism of repression has taken root in all of us. It is the base of all our activities, political, social, economic, emotional. If we take repression as a metaphor, then we too must be shocked into a good look at what we really are and really want. Everything will have changed in a few years and unless we take notice of the change and understand the causes, we will end up as unthinking prisoners.

**Then it's a political film by implication?**

Yes, by metaphor. It's not possible to make a political film in any other way today—an effective one. We have all been burned by the mass media, so that politics no longer speak to us. Direct political films speak only to those already convinced, and remain in a sort of ghetto. One has to find another way, which for me is to speak in emotional terms, to go to the depths of things on a personal level, and to hope that the consciousness of what those things mean will spread into wider areas. It is necessary to attract the widest possible

audience, without them even being aware that they are seeing a political film.

**Your first feature has not been seen very widely, but that too was political?**

Perhaps more directly so. It was supposed to be a film about certain myths—of the worker, the proletariat, the peasant—in relation to other myths, of parties and party leaders. It approaches things obliquely; it is, after all, a comedy. The film has had an unhappy destiny. The distribution company went out of business just before it was to be released, and it has taken two years for the film to surface. It is just now in Rome and here in Milan, and will be on television. In a way it is two years too late for the film. It is very modest, made on a small budget. I'm not comparing myself to him, but if you need a comparison, it is close to the films of Pasolini, like *Accattone*.

Pasolini was in many ways the natural heir to Gramsci. The only mind in the last decades who had the power to go to the roots of things. And that, of course, is seen as being dangerous, both by the right and the left. He was a man of the left, but he often shocked the left more than those on the right are able to do. Pasolini always lived on the edge of scandal—in the most positive sense. Remember that he was thrown out of the Communist Party in 1949 because he was homosexual. After that he stayed close to the party, but never let it forget its own repressions. He was best as a critic, and it was best for all of us that he remained outside any party. You know he inspired *1900*. In the idea, that is, that people need an identity, a sense of their own force, to remain free of any crippling ideology.

He was also a sort of prophet. In 1968, when I was twenty, I recall the poem he wrote after a confrontation between the police and students. He pointed out that the students came from bourgeois families and that the police were the sons of the poor, and then asked what we made of that. Pasolini saw that in spite of 1968, the bourgeois would in its way continue to reproduce itself, even if it called itself revolutionary. Certain figures are

inescapable if you live in Italy and think at all: Gramsci, Lenin, Pasolini.

**Speaking of homosexuality, as we were a moment ago, there is a constant rumour that *Last Tango* was originally written about a homosexual relationship, with the Schneider role played by a boy.**

No. From the first the character was a girl. From the first the film was simply about sexuality and human relationships, and it was going to be made with non-professionals. Then Brando came along, and so on. The film, of course, is a very basic one about sexuality and identity, and therefore one can see why the rumour came about.

**And speaking of *Tango*: your name is, after all, Bertolucci. Is that a problem for you?**

In a way, but it isn't tragic. I know that for some time people will identify me by saying 'Giuseppe Bertolucci, brother of Bernardo.' Of course. But I would hope that in time they will look at the films we make rather than just at who signed them. The name opens doors that might have remained shut, but those doors only open once or twice, and you have to step through them as yourself.

With this film now, Bernardo has helped by lending his name to the project. My cousin as well, of course, has helped, since he has produced films by Visconti, Risi, Lattuada and others. Fox have put up the money—which is not a fortune, by the way—for the production. American companies have in the past put up money for adventure films and comedies and so on, but I think this is the first time they have given money to a small, personal film. They usually ask that the film then be made in English, but they have let us shoot in direct sound, in Italian. That's just as well, since I don't speak English, nor does Mariangela Melato.

Bernardo, by the way, is of another opinion about shooting in English. His films cost a good deal more, and so he has taken big American stars, has shot in English, or a mixture of languages, and has dubbed in what is necessary later. He needs the stars because supposedly they help get the money back at the box-office. Of course it is then usually necessary to change the story a bit to explain why this American is living in Rome or Milan. Bernardo tells me that American is the natural language of the movies. He isn't crazy. There is always the risk of falling into a very literary language with Italian or French, but with American the risk is not so great. There are directors here, of course, including a very famous lady, who make films in English without being able to speak a word of it. That is real schizophrenia!

**Is that one of the current problems for Italian cinema? That search for 'internationalism'?**

It goes in waves here, and we are now at the lowest ebb ever. The cinema was born with neo-realism. There was some good cinema early on, particularly around Naples, but then Fascism came early to Italy in terms of the history of the cinema, and then there was nothing much. After neo-realism died, there came a period of comedies, some fine, some not at all. Then the cinema went through a crisis and almost died. Then came a whole rupture in the 60s. Along came the Taviani brothers, Bernardo, Bellocchio, Ferreri, Pasolini and so on. Then came a restoration



of Italian comedies again. Now we are in a slump in which very little is happening. Part of that comes from the economic crisis, which is world-wide, but which we Italians seem to have heard about first. Bad news always travels fast here. Now distributors in Italy, and that means to a large extent the American presence here, are willing only to take films without risk. No more experiment. No more personal films. People now go to see events—not films really, but events, like *Star Wars*. That is true everywhere, but as I said, bad news gets to Italy first. Then, we have very few young directors coming up, or if there are young directors they aren't fighting to make films, or if they are fighting they are losing the battle. Italy is committing cultural suicide.

**Yet the Italian cinema is popular elsewhere. It strikes me as strange that in France there is a boom in the market for Italian comedies, and that critics talk about 'the great Risi...'**

'...the great Comencini', 'the great Lattuada.' Yes, I know. That is part of the myth-making of the French *cinéophile*. It isn't the first time, but perhaps it is the silliest. The French haven't had a sort of middle-of-the-road cinema of their own in a long while. There is a great division there between 'intellectual' and 'popular' films. They looked around and found the American cinema, which could appeal to both groups. Now they have found the Italians, but what Italians! They can't seem just to take those films for what they are. They must elevate and analyse

until they have something worthy of their attention. But it is exactly the producers, directors and distributors of those films which have prevented the growth of serious cinema here. Take Risi's latest film, *Caro Papa*: it is not admissible to treat terrorism in a trivial way like that. That is something left over from 'liberal' ideas of the 50s. Anyway, do we have serious film-makers left in Italy? After the deaths of Visconti, Pasolini, Rossellini... Fellini was fine until *La Dolce Vita* and then came those empty, silly films. There is my brother, of course. I almost forgot him!

People are now talking of television as the answer, and point to the Tavianis and Olmi and the prizes at Cannes. That's fine, but it hasn't much to do with the real situation. It is a dangerous illusion. Cinema is a social event. Television is not. There must be a dialectic in the cinema between a serious kind of film and those aggressive and regressive films like *Star Wars*. One can't leave the cinema to those films and retreat to television.

**And your own film? You seem to be very fond of the *plan séquence*, with long takes and a good deal of camera movement.**

Last night, you mean? Yes, I worked that whole thing out. I think it was very beautiful. However, my cameraman and my editor kept telling me it wouldn't work. The editor in particular insisted that when we got to the editing table we would be stuck with footage that we couldn't cut at all. They said it was megalomania and that I wasn't taking into account the inner rhythm of the

sequence, and that it couldn't be changed or saved later. I argued a lot, but I understood.

When did you leave the shooting? Afterwards, I cut the action into several shorter sequences and we filmed them separately, keeping the same space and relationships. I admitted I was caught up in the wonder of the dreams of a young *cinéaste*. The idea of a constantly moving camera in relationship with moving actors in that gigantic space. So we shot it in pieces. Then we shot it my way. It may be that they were right and I was wrong when we come to edit, but what if it is the other way round?

**And direct sound?**

It gives an atmosphere and immediacy you can't get otherwise. There is a concentration from the actors that doesn't exist if they just go through the motions of speaking the dialogue. Mariangela took to it immediately. She came from the theatre but this is the first direct sound she has done. Bruno, of course, has probably never shot the other way, so to him it is normal. But few sound men in Italy are willing to do it. Italians talk a lot and it is often impossible to get silence on a set, so perhaps that is why direct sound never caught on. It also means we can keep Bruno's voice. He speaks with an accent, and that is exactly right. I wanted a character who seems to come from another place. Partially the idea of casting him was a mixture of Italian cinema with something else—the new German cinema, perhaps. Bruno represents that mixture for me. ■

Giuseppe Bertolucci (behind camera) and his unit shooting at Milan's Stazione Centrale







# The Sacred Terror

Jan Dawson

Like John Cleese briefing the staff of Fawlty Towers on the tactful way to receive a party of German tourists ('mustn't mention the war'), the British Council currently issues official visitors to the Federal Republic with a list of topics which it would be inappropriate to mention. Something of a political conversation-stopper, the list includes abortion, *Berufsverbot*, terrorism and official anti-terrorist measures. Or, put in a different perspective, the sensitive substance of Alexander Kluge's *Occasional Work of a Female Slave* (1974), of Max Willutzki's *Vera Romeyke: Not Acceptable* (1976), of the collectively made *Germany in Autumn* (1978) and of Fassbinder's last completed film, *The Third Generation* (1979).

Initially, the list of films which it would be a diplomatic *faux pas* for the official visitor to discuss surprises by its shortness; not least when one considers the extent to which the New German Cinema, increasingly dependent on television for the major part of its financing, has become increasingly dominated by television's 'message-is-the-medium' mentality. Expressly committed by its charter to encouraging programmes which 'further the course of social justice', television has helped shape a generation of film-makers to whose work, in which formal considerations are often brutally subordinated to the top-heavy element of content, the studio discussion is frequently regarded as providing a necessary coda.



Fassbinder could 'get away with' using TV money to produce so many of his earlier films only because their *content* could be reduced to a topical social problem and hot debating issue. The aggression with which he and a handful of other film-makers might attack the root causes of the social injustices around them could as easily be neutralised as reinforced by the appendage of a balanced discussion. As Ula Stöckl remarked of her last, TV-commissioned film, *A Woman and Her Responsibilities* (1978): 'I would have preferred to be able to show more of the characters' complex psychological relationships than to have the film kept to 72 minutes and followed by a 20-minute discussion with psychiatrists and a TV producer.'

Perhaps significantly, although an unwanted pregnancy is one of the first links in the chain which inexorably leads Stöckl's over-conscientious heroine to an incurable mental illness, and although the heroine's father strongly puts the traditional moral case for her keeping the child and 'facing up to her responsibilities' by marrying its father, the film's only argument for abortion is an oblique one, produced by its senselessly tragic dénouement. No matter how balanced the programming, television is clearly not the place for any unequivocal statement of the unconstitutional case for either abortion or terrorism.

That remarkably few German films produced for the cinema have touched on the British Council's list of contentious subjects is also no great surprise when one considers that the German film industry is supported almost entirely by public funds, received either directly from the Ministry of the Interior or through the agency of the

Margit Carstensen (above) and Eddie Constantine in 'The Third Generation'



# Shadows of Terrorism in the New German Cinema

Filmförderungsanstalt (Film Promotion Board), which is expressly forbidden by law from subsidising films which 'offend against the Constitution or the laws, or which offend moral or religious feeling' (section 7, paragraph 9 of the 1974 version of the German Film Law). Not only are the Board's small quota of production advances confined to co-productions with television, but the fact that the bulk of its funds are administered in the form of retroactive awards drastically reduces the chances of any 'unsuitable' films slipping through the subsidies' net. Kluge produced *Occasional Work* with a script award from the Ministry; but after discrepancies had been noticed between his submitted script and the finished film he had to fight a much-publicised campaign to avoid giving back the advance, before the award of a quality rating from yet another agency (the Filmbewertungsstelle, or Film Assessment Board) conferred on his film the respectability needed to make it eligible for additional, retroactive funding.

These financial intricacies are relevant because, dependent on the previous film's track record for funds to make the next one, film-makers who tackle an unacceptable subject may find themselves not merely with one film without a distributor on their hands but also with no means of re-entry into the virtually closed circle of subsidised film production. The political risk may easily prove synonymous with commercial or professional suicide, even within the context of a non-commercial (i.e. loss-making) industry. Without the intervention of any of the official machinery which deprives the politically suspect citizen of his right to work in the public sector, the film-maker who steps too far over the fine line of balanced opinion risks finding himself effectively just as much the victim of *Berufsverbot*, deprived not so

much of the right to work as of the economic means to do so.

This double jeopardy explains the rather conservative caution with which radical German film-makers are apt to approach politically vexatious areas. Where the overt censorship of Franco's régime had the aesthetic consequence of strengthening the Spanish proclivity to allegory, to the point where every dubious domestic saga of greedy passions, churlish servants and disintegrating bourgeois households might, with sufficient radical charity, be decoded as a blistering analysis and critique of Spanish Fascism, the indirect censorship implicit in West Germany's film subsidies system has given rise, not merely to a cautious self-censorship on the part of the film-makers themselves, but also to a twin passion (fashion?) for oblique approaches and microcosmic case histories.

*The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*; *The Brutalisation of Franz Blum*; *Vera Romeyke: Not Acceptable*; *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages*—the very similarity of the titles suggests one of the favourite dramatic strategies for querying the moral or juridical bases of contemporary society. Its anomalies or injustices are exposed through the experiences of a single protagonist, the vicissitudes of whose fate, exemplary in the Aristotelian sense, form the focus of a suspense narrative which takes its tone from a cross between the *fait divers* and the conventional thriller. The investigative reporting beloved of both television and tabloid journalism acquires a parallel in this peculiarly German genre of investigative cinema, in which generalisations are strictly confined to the mind of the beholder; but in which, none the less, the specific (usually fictional) cases under investigation may easily be read as ciphers for specific cases of a different order.

I'm sure that a large part of the enormous popular success, first of Schlöndorff and von Trotta's *Katharina Blum*, then of von Trotta's first solo feature, *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages* (1978), lies in the fact that both films appear, to the domestic audience at least, to be secretly talking about the taboo subjects of terrorism and anti-terrorist repression. Katharina herself is, of course, primarily the subject of a yellow-press witch-hunt. The 1974 Böll story in which she made her first appearance was subtitled, 'Or: how violence develops and where it can lead'; and certainly, in the chronologically structured film if not in Böll's dry retrospective narration, the fact that Katharina is technically guilty—a) of harbouring a fugitive from justice and b) of shooting the unscrupulous journalist responsible for her public degradation—consistently takes dramatic second place to her harassment by zealous policemen with seemingly limitless powers of search, seizure and interrogation. That Katharina has, as may or may not befit a woman in love and with a keen sense of privacy, throughout the film been lying as systematically to her interrogators as the press has been lying about her own moral character emerges only belatedly and parenthetically.

The dramatic investigation of the case of Christa Klages (inspired by a real-life case) is structured quite differently, since very early in the film the audience witnesses the crime—the armed robbery of a bank—for which Christa and her boy friend Werner will be hounded

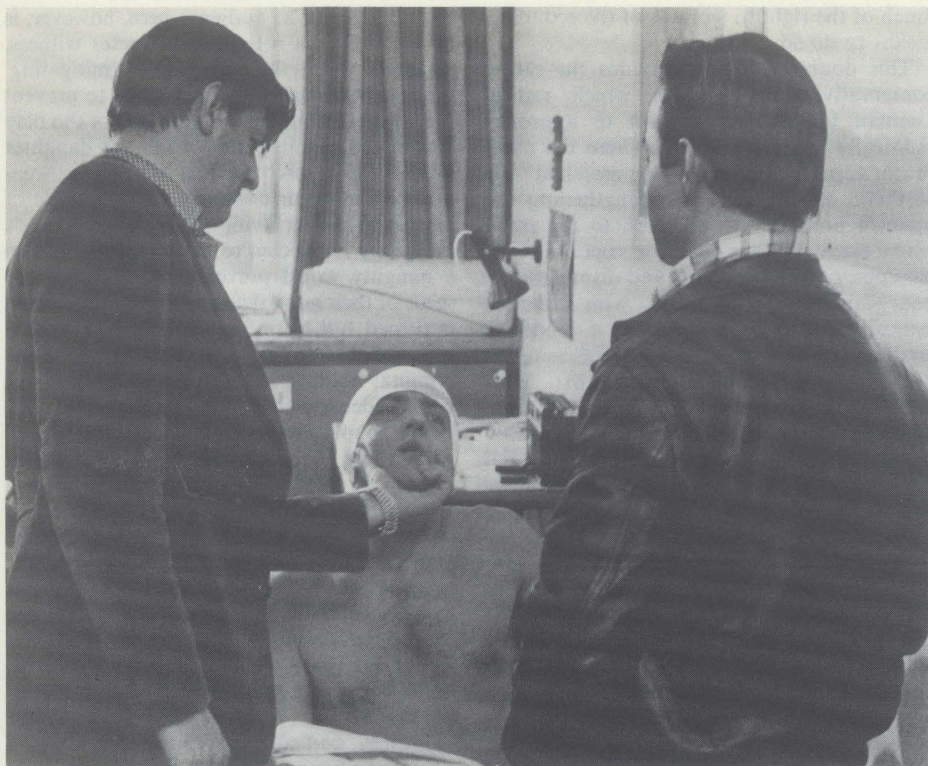
by the police. The audience here, however, is also cast in the role of a character witness, initiated into the criminals' 'mitigating' motives (Christa needs the money to prevent the closure, from lack of support, of the play school she founded and which her daughter attends) and into the fact that these well-meaning amateur criminals are incapable of harming another living soul. The audience's sympathy is directed to these fugitives whom a naughty world prevents from sowing the seeds of their good deed; while its indignation is turned full beam on to the police, whose sophisticated technology gives the débutant criminal nothing like a sporting chance and who, indeed, persist in tracking down the guilty couple just as if they were the sort of people who robbed banks at gunpoint. When Werner is spotted trying to steal a car and shot down after failing to stop when challenged, it's almost impossible for the audience to avoid the conditioned reflex reaction of 'police brutality'. But while it would no doubt have been possible for the excited policeman to shoot less lethally, it would not have been possible for him to know what we know about the harmlessness of his target. Werner's death of course reinforces audience sympathy for Christa, who thereafter rapidly discovers that German society offers no hiding place for outlaws.

What *Katharina* and *Christa* have in common, beyond the fact that WDR television and Schlöndorff's own company Bioskop Film were co-producers on both films, is the fact that both show the extent of police powers in contemporary Germany as being sweeping enough to narrow the gap between a trial by jury and a post-mortem, without ever overtly alluding to the politically motivated crimes used to justify the extent of these powers to the general public. Since reminders of these anti-social acts inescapably surface at every border control and almost daily in TV newscasts and newspaper headlines, it is easy for the audience to supply the missing ingredient *x*. Particularly easy when the *scale* of the manhunt for Katharina's lover Götten suggests to the spectator that he must be the State's most dangerous enemy, rather than merely an army deserter wrongly (of course) suspected of murder.

Indeed, in both these Bioskop productions, the audience's own gallery of images from actuality supplements the overt theme of their suitable-for-television scripts. While both are explicitly suited for stimulating debates on the rights of the state versus the rights of the individual (and the camera, by isolating the hunted protagonists, makes it quite clear which side the directors are on), the big, nationally preoccupying questions are raised only implicitly or by association. Namely, should politically motivated criminals be treated any differently from others; and what social forces turn citizens into, to mention the unmentionable, terrorists? Is there, the films avoid directly asking, something to be extrapolated from the fact that the very forces designed to suppress crime help turn Katharina from a demure housekeeper into an impenitent killer, and Christa from an idealistic child-minder into a bank robber?

It is only against this background of cautious, indirect speech that the political ground gained by *Germany in Autumn* can be measured. The film has been attacked by the





Bruno Ganz as the victim of a policeman's bullet in 'A Knife in the Head'

German left for its failure to depict the role and situation of the working class, and for the balanced, consensus opinion of its quotation conclusion. ('Once atrocity has reached a certain point, it no longer matters who started it. It should simply stop.') These criticisms ignore the film's principal achievement, which lies precisely in bringing terrorism out of the closet. It dares to mention Schleyer and Mogadishu, Baader, Ensslin and Raspe by name; to show the real-life Horst Mahler in his Berlin cell (where he is interviewed by actor Helmut Griem in the role of a TV editor); to attempt—through an often uneasy mixture of fictional and documentary material—to assess the impact on non-criminal, everyday lives of the permanent state of emergency in which anonymous denunciations are encouraged, police raids may occur without warrants or warnings, and the average citizen holds his peace in hope of avoiding the attention of either denunciators, police or kidnappers.

In the case of *Germany in Autumn*, the 'balanced view' at which its dozen collaborators arrive in an effort to achieve a collective statement may also be seen as a plus point. Not only does the film dare to talk about terrorism; it also dares to generalise from the specific real and imaginary incidents it shows and, if only through its rough juxtaposing of different styles and cinematic idioms, to stimulate its audiences to generalising in their turn. This may not sound like a giant political stride, but for the film-makers involved it represented a considerable political risk—a fact which speaks as eloquently about prevalent forms of indirect censorship as does the Böll/Schlöndorff episode, in which a television programming committee rejects three successive versions of *Antigone* because it feels that Sophocles' play may be construed as supporting the use of violence to combat violence or unjust laws, and as presenting a female terrorist as a heroine.

*Germany in Autumn* was made without funding from either television or the state. Its

budget came principally from the Filmverlag der Autoren (whose majority shareholder, *Spiegel* proprietor Rudolph Augstein, saw nothing too extreme about trying to make a film which aspired to the condition of a newspaper), with Schlöndorff and Kluge both also contributing some money. At its world premiere (during the 1978 Berlin Festival), Kluge insisted: 'This film is made with a collective disregard for censorship and it runs more political risks than any one auteur could bear.' Surprisingly, none of the film's vociferous critics from either the right or the left contested this statement.

While Kluge's own contribution, in which teacher Gabi Teichert sets out on a digging expedition into the past, goes back beyond Mayerling to unearth the historical antecedents of Stammheim's official suicides, few of the film's other contributors (besides Horst Mahler) formally observe any connection between the present political climate and German Fascism of the 30s and 40s. Most of its dramatised incidents are subjectively concerned with the effect on the private individual of being a member of a society whose other members (a man requesting help after a road accident, a couple crossing the frontier on a country outing) are presumed guilty until proven innocent. Cumulatively, the film's patchwork incidents show that the authorities have no monopoly on such eroding suspicion, that it has permeated the consciousness of bureaucrats, non-conformists and loose-livers alike. *Germany in Autumn* thus apparently demonstrates its makers' sense of complicity in a phenomenon they deplore, simultaneously illustrating their helplessness to escape the vicious, cause-and-effect circle of fear and suspicion. Yet because its fictional characters are largely passive and helpless, they provoke more pity than fear, and the film's self-criticism generally strikes a wistful, rather elegiac note.

Only Fassbinder remains totally immune from this mood of faintly complacent lamentation. His logic, in the film's opening

and toughest sequence, is as faultless as his behaviour is appalling. Instead of hiding his own undemocratic impulses behind some attractive fictional character, he characterises himself as a bullying boor in the old Teutonic tradition, and plays the part to the hilt. Playing right along with him are his mother, the actress Lilo Pempeit, and his late lover Armin Meier. Although the episode's tight structure reveals disciplined dramaturgical handling, Fassbinder appears literally to be laying his own life under the microscope. He shows his own unbelieving liberal rage at the news bulletins about Mogadishu and Stammheim; and even while railing against his interlocutors for their willingness to accept a revenge morality and to counter lawlessness with a summary, undemocratic punishment, he shows himself both as running his private life with an intolerant authoritarianism and as caught up in the prevailing paranoia—coming the heavy hand with Armin, throwing out a casual dossier, flushing his cocaine down the lavatory at the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

In the angry philosophical dialogues with his mother (who compares the current atmosphere to that of the Nazi era and advocates delegating to the media a monopoly on free speech), Fassbinder explicitly insists that the fundamental principle of a democracy is that not even the State is immune from observing democratic procedures. He also brutally brings home the idea that all its members are responsible for their society by showing in his own domestic behaviour all the extremism of the hijackers and all the repressive authoritarianism of the special police. His is the only episode in the film absolutely to deny the socially acceptable separation, of extremists on the one side (terrorists and policemen both) and helpless 'average citizens' on the other. Perhaps, too, the only dramatised episode prepared to countenance the disintegration of German society as a logical consequence of its present politically contradictory state. What he says to a journalist at the start of his episode, about the depiction of marriage in his films—'I find it tremendously more positive for a shaky marriage to fall apart as the result of a couple seeing their problems made concrete in my films than to leave the institution of marriage unquestioned and unexamined'—might also stand for his own depiction of society. His belief in freedom of thought and speech stands as an absolute, independent of whether this freedom functions as a panacea or a provocation.

The idea of a fresh start following an enforced return to zero is one of the *leitmotifs* running through Reinhard Hauff's *A Knife in the Head*, the top prize-winner at last year's Paris Festival, which has struck an enormously responsive chord from German press and public alike. Co-produced by WDR and Schlöndorff's two companies, Bioskop and Hallelujah-Film, it belongs by more than just its pedigree to the same stable as *Katharina Blum* and *Christa Klages*. Its central character, Hoffmann (for whose renascent humanity Bruno Ganz evolves a marvellous, simian sensitivity), is a bio-genetist rendered amnesiac by a bullet in the brain. The bullet has been fired by a nervous policeman during a raid on the youth club to which Hoffmann had apparently come to collect his wife; and while Hoffmann's friends denounce his injury as a



typical specimen of trigger-happy police brutality, the police defend it by claiming Hoffmann as a dangerous terrorist and mounting a round-the-clock vigil at his hospital bedside.

Although the behaviour of the police is not designed to win audience sympathy (unlike the anarchic tricks to which the patient instinctively has recourse in his state of occasionally cute mutism), Hoffmann himself proves as desperately anxious as they are to discover the truth about his past actions and character. The film becomes something of an existential thriller, interweaving an individual's quest for his own identity with a more generalised quest for a political truth. Its development has something of the conventional chase film, but with the suspense element deriving less from the uncertain outcome of a conflict between good and evil than from an overall metaphysical uncertainty about exactly who is standing on which side of the moral barricades.

At the end of the film, Hoffmann discovers within himself a capacity for the wrathful violence of which he has been accused; while the policeman responsible for his injury experiences that fear—of the random mis-carriages of a rough justice—which the film shows as overshadowing the lives of civilian citizens in a society where it's permitted to shoot on suspicion. Yet although the scriptwriter Peter Schneider, who based the medical side of Hoffmann's story on the injuries sustained by a friend in a traffic accident, makes free use of the word 'terrorism', both he and Hauff seem too aware of the multiple philosophical interpretations of Hoffmann's case to achieve any kind of clear political analysis. Hoffmann becomes something of a contemporary German Everyman, striving to reclaim his autonomy while buffeted hither and yon by forces outside his control. Yet at the same time, the peculiarities of his case (marital as well as medical), and the superstar performance through which it is explored, make him more of a mythological system-bucker than an identification figure. The film certainly plays in a generalised way on its audience's paranoia. Unlike *Katharina Blum*, however, which says something about terrorism while ostensibly exploring something else, *A Knife in the Head* talks of terrorism while actually discussing a more elusive crisis of moral identity. Even though its dénouement reveals a little bit of the terrorist in each of us, its whole dramatic thrust, and the emphasis on the isolated individual hero versus the medical and legal authorities, maintains the distinction between them and us, heroes and villains.

Not so *The Third Generation*, Fassbinder's most violently outspoken film yet, and incidentally the first from Germany (some five years after Chabrol's *Nada*) to represent fictional terrorists on the screen. Expanding into a high-camp melodrama the idea of collective responsibility underlying his *Germany in Autumn* episode, Fassbinder disregards the politically rigidified idea of terrorists as either demons or martyrs, and instead locates the colourful members of his terrorist cell (many of whose biographical details are shared with the Baader-Meinhoff group) at the centre of a complex, wheels-within-wheels social machine governed only by the laws of greed, profit, cross and double-cross.

Distorted, trivialised, made histrionic, terrorism here becomes the last desperate bid for individualism in a cynically mechanised society where everyone—cop, robber or plain Joe Average—is at once manipulator and manipulated. Society's outlaws are here shown to be fashioned in its own image. For Fassbinder, the third generation of terrorists, lacking respectively the idealism and the solidarity of the first two, are motivated only by a gratuitous cult of action and danger which 'make the life which ends in death more bearable.' His starting point is the premise that, 'If terrorists did not exist, the State would have had to invent them.'

Although a post-credits title, mixed in with the assortment of political and sexual graffiti which punctuate the action, announces that it's 'dedicated to a true lover, hence probably to nobody', this text was reportedly the result of a misreading in the cutting room of 'lover' for 'liberal'. For in Fassbinder's angry, and only superficially cynical, apocalyptic vision, there are no right or left, no good or bad guys. His outlaw band are unwittingly the creation of a right-wing industrialist (Eddie Constantine), worried about the slumping sales of his security devices. Both they and he are incestuously involved with the depraved chief of police (Hark Bohm), all part of the same vast, Cain-and-Abel style family. The film's final irony has Constantine accidentally caught in his own trap, kidnapped by the very monsters he has spawned and playing along with the popular iconography of terrorism by patiently submitting to endless retakes of his 'scene' in their home-movie ultimatum while, out of shot, the terrorists petulantly coquette around in carnival costumes.

*The Third Generation* is not the first Fassbinder film to suggest a kinship between cops and outlaws (this motif ran through his earliest thrillers, as through many of the films noirs which inspired them). Nor is it the first to depict society as the lethal creation of some corporate Frankenstein: his two-part science fiction thriller *World on a Wire* (1973) had its scientist hero discovering that he was merely a computer-built facsimile of himself. But it is the first of his films to locate these twin

themes unequivocally in contemporary society or to relate them to post-'68 developments there. If its characters still behave with theatrical, nay, Sirkian relish, the film's references are none the less more frequently drawn from actuality than from the movies. (It is arguably the fusion of the two which the public has found so offensively disrespectful.) Certainly, movies—in common with a whole range of audio-visual gadgets—are a prominent part of the actuality Fassbinder depicts.

There is virtually no sequence in *The Third Generation* in which the characters (and audience) are not being bombarded by multimedia sounds and images, and surrounded by sophisticated technological toys. From the opening sequence in which Hanna Schygulla, here playing the servant of no less than three political masters, watches a video-cassette of the assisted suicide in Bresson's *The Devil, Probably*, the spectator is overwhelmed by the choice of meanings offered by the film's multi-track sounds, by the impossibility of making any kind of coherent sense from the Babel of the new technology. The flickering screens in the corner of nearly every frame (images within images echoing the theme of wheels within wheels) connect and question both the medium of film and the ideology of surveillance. The watchers are watched and the biters bite. Nothing is sacred in a society which has substituted communications systems for forthright communication. Not even terrorism, the nation's sacred monster.

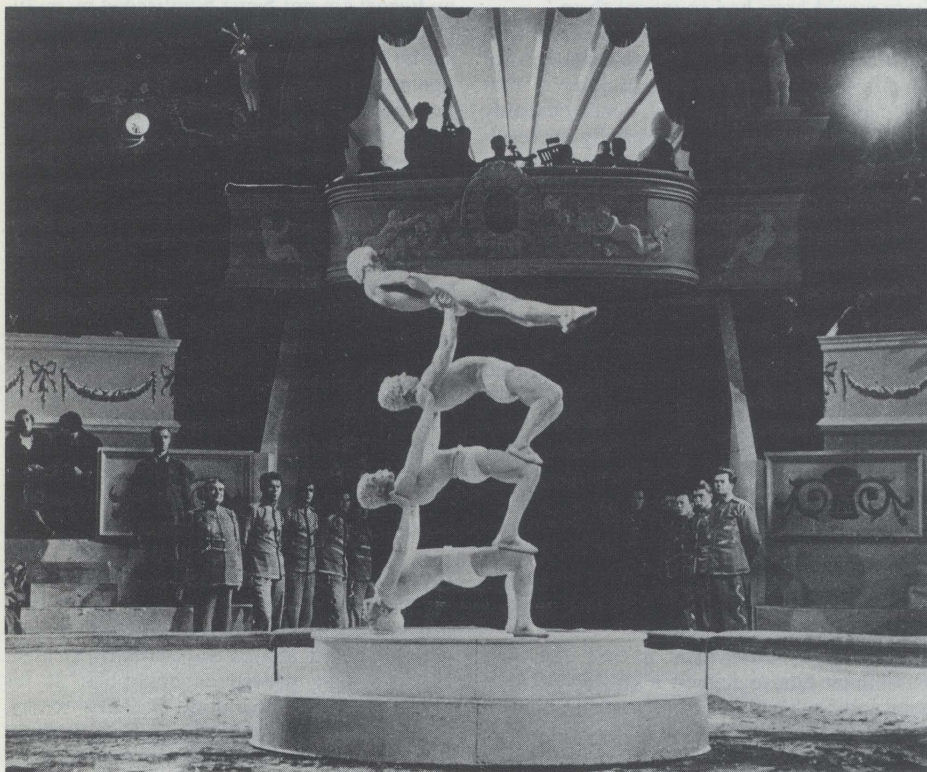
It is in this consequent spirit that Fassbinder dares to make fun of his misfit desperadoes, to show them squabbling over properties on the Monopoly board or over possible exotic aliases. In Germany at least, his irony has proved as unpopular as his adulation might have done. Needless to say, *The Third Generation* was produced without public money, by Fassbinder's own company in association with the Filmverlag. In addition to his usual involvement as writer and director, Fassbinder also worked as cameraman—perhaps in defiance of his remorseless conclusion that individualism is a blind illusion in an impersonal technocracy. ■

'Germany in Autumn': policemen filming the crowd at the Stuttgart cemetery





# ALEXANDROV



'Circus' (1936)

## Norman Swallow

G. V. Alexandrov has been personally involved in so many significant developments in the Soviet cinema that the condescension with which Western critics have treated him is something of a puzzle. Of course there have been exceptions, and Georges Sadoul, predictably, was one of them: 'He is the master of the Soviet comedy-musical whose style he established with *Jazz Comedy*.' So why is he neglected? Because he is guilty of having 'survived' the darkest days of Stalin? Can the reason be that, in the words of Ivor Montagu, he is always 'moderate and modest'? Or is it because so many of his creative years were spent in the company of Eisenstein?

The comparative neglect of Alexandrov could well be the result of his persistent loyalty to Eisenstein at a time when so many of their contemporaries made films of enduring originality: *The Adventures of Oktyabrina*, directed by Kozintsev and Trauberg, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*, directed by Kuleshov, and Protazanov's *Aelita* all appeared in 1924, the year when Alexandrov worked with Eisenstein on *Strike*. *Miss Mend*, directed by Barnet and Otsep, was shown in 1926, Komarov's *The Kiss of Mary Pickford* in 1927, and Mikaberidze's *My Grandmother* in 1929, at a time when Alexandrov was assisting Eisenstein on *October* and *The General Line*.

I mention those films because they are both comic and 'eccentric', and Alexandrov's main achievement has always been in the field of eccentric comedy. Yet it was not until 1934 that he directed his first full-length film, *Jazz Comedy*. It was not only successful in its own country, despite the accusation that it fell somewhat short of socialist realism, but was

very popular abroad. At the Venice Festival of 1935 it received awards for direction and music (by Dunayevsky), and was obliquely honoured by attacks from Mussolini's Fascist press, which protested that 'the Bolsheviks have no right to try to persuade the world that they lead happier lives than anyone else.' Forty-three years later Alexandrov took his

rightful place in the National Film Theatre's season of 'Russian Eccentrics', together with many of those other Soviet directors whose reputation had galloped ahead of his own.

Grigori Alexandrov is now 76, and lately his time has been divided between writing his memoirs and working on what we all hope will be the 'definitive' version of *Que Viva Mexico!*. In 1974 the remaining original rushes were sent to Moscow from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and a technical and production team, headed by Alexandrov and Yutkevich, began to assemble them in terms of the original scenario, of which Alexandrov was the co-author with Eisenstein. So Eisenstein's shadow has returned, but Alexandrov, as always, bears no resentment. He is the only surviving member of the famous Mexican trio; the cameraman, the great Eduard Tisse, died in 1961. This would seem an appropriate time to reassess his contribution to film, and there are certain aspects of his career which seem particularly relevant. How much did his early life outside the cinema affect his film work? To what extent have critics and biographers been unfair to Alexandrov in their tendency to treat films he made with Eisenstein as the work of Eisenstein alone? How important are those works which were solely 'Directed by G. V. Alexandrov'?

Alexandrov was born in the Ural mountain city of Ekaterinburg, which after the Revolution was the centre of one of the most fiercely Bolshevik of all the new regional Soviets. It was also one of the first places in the USSR where both cinemas and film companies were nationalised. Alexandrov was 17 when the Winter Palace was stormed by the Bolsheviks, and by then he had already worked as a messenger-boy for the local theatre, an assistant to the 'props man', a make-up assistant, a costume assistant, and as 'assistant to the assistant director'. He became a director himself for the first time in 1918, in a front line theatre during the Civil War: 'I wrote a play at night, rehearsed it the next day, and directed and acted in it that evening. In those days we worshipped everything that was new and hated all that was old. I remember directing a play by Mayakovsky that we performed in a circus, and we used circus artists as well as actors. Throughout the action of the play I had them cart-wheeling, leaping and jumping all round the arena. But I was especially fascinated by the cinema. I had run errands for the local "electric theatre", and the projection box was my first Film School. I was excited to see parts of my country that I'd never seen before, and New York skyscrapers and western cities, and I realised what a large window on the world this small box was. Then, when I was in the 3rd Army, I had the job of re-editing some old Russian and foreign films that were felt to be "ideologically false". I began to realise that the cinema could do so many things that in the theatre, with its physical restrictions, were impossible. The cinema would become my profession. It was in the cinema that I would write, act, produce and direct.'

At the age of 17 he was sent to Moscow 'to improve my qualifications', and it was in Moscow, at the Proletkult Workers' Theatre, that he saw the production of Jack London's *The Mexican*. The director was Valeri Smishlayev, and the designer of the sets and





Shooting 'October': Alexandrov in cap at top. The horse statues overlook the square in front of the Winter Palace in Leningrad. Below: Norman Swallow (left) and Alexandrov return to the scene for the former's BBC film on Eisenstein (1970)

costumes was Sergei Eisenstein. But it was Eisenstein who had effectively taken over the production and imposed on it a style that was at least 'eccentric' and arguably 'surrealist'. At once Alexandrov decided to join the Proletkult, and he was one of six successful candidates for six hundred advertised vacancies. He joined the cast of *The Mexican* as one of two rival boxers who fought so seriously at each performance that the audience rarely knew which of them would win. In Eisenstein's production of Ostrovsky's play *Enough Folly in a Wise Man*, in which the only props used were those of the circus, he walked on a high wire in his bare feet while the band daringly played Western jazz. The same play included a short film sequence, the first to be directed by Eisenstein, which ended with Alexandrov jumping off a high roof and bursting from the screen on to the stage.

It was a time when theatre and film were

complementary aspects of the same revolutionary art. Eisenstein and Alexandrov attended Kuleshov's famous 'Film Workshop' and Kuleshov's students made regular visits to the Proletkult. In 1922 the Factory of the Eccentric Actor (FEKS) opened in Petrograd, and among its leaders were Kozintsev, Trauberg and Yutkevich. The general trend was from theatre to film and, significantly, each work was genuinely made by a 'Collective' rather than by a single creative artist. For *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* Kuleshov was credited as director, but Pudovkin's name appeared four times, as co-author, assistant director, designer and actor. The director of *Strike* was Eisenstein, but the scenario was by the 'Proletkult Collective', and Alexandrov's name appeared three times in the credits, as a member of the Collective, as an assistant director, and as an

actor. For *Battleship Potemkin* he was credited as one of five assistant directors as well as an actor. It was the common pattern in those days: *Miss Mend* had three scriptwriters and two directors, *The Devil's Wheel* had two directors, and *The Death Ray* had four 'assistants' working with Kuleshov as director. *October* was 'written and directed' by both Eisenstein and Alexandrov, with three 'assistants'.

In our own time we have gone to the opposite extreme, and the Collective has been replaced by the 'auteur'. So *Strike*, *Battleship Potemkin*, *October* and *The General Line* are generally considered to be 'by Eisenstein', and are often mentioned without any reference to Alexandrov. This is fair to the extent that Eisenstein was the acknowledged 'leader' of the Collective, its dominant personality, and almost certainly its greatest creative talent. Yet when Ivor Montagu worked closely with Eisenstein, Alexandrov and Tisse, he soon came to realise the basic nature of their teamwork. 'When they worked together, each was so completely devoted and necessary to the enterprise... that they seemed less three separable persons than the integrated parts of one creator.'

In the films which are normally treated as the work of Eisenstein, it is not hard to assess the contribution of Tisse; a famous example is the scene of mourning in the dense mist of the Black Sea in *Battleship Potemkin*, which Eisenstein had insisted was impossible. It is much harder to be precise about Alexandrov's contribution. So much depends on folk memory, but we certainly know that to credit Alexandrov as co-author and co-director of *October* and *The General Line* is to state the truth. In the case of *October* the problem of creating a practical scenario from an enormous amount of rough material, together with a tight shooting schedule, resulted in many last-minute changes to the script itself, and the need to shoot more than one sequence at a time. A good example of this has been quoted by Jay Leyda: 'While Eisenstein made the scenes at the Smolny Institute, Alexandrov worked on the studio filming of the Bolshevik messengers to General Kornilov's "Wild Division", ending in the famous dance sequence.'

We can fairly assume that Alexandrov's creative contribution to *October* was largely in sequences of fantasy or 'eccentricity'. There is newsreel coverage of him directing the scene where the statue of the Tsar disintegrates, losing in slow motion its arms and head, as a symbol of the collapse of an Empire. Similarly the sequence in which Kerensky walks up the staircase of the Winter Palace was as much the inspiration of Alexandrov as of Eisenstein. The steps are the real ones, but the length of the walk, higher and higher, is so exaggerated that at the end of it Kerensky can no longer be taken seriously. Alexandrov has often quoted the words of Gogol: 'He who is afraid of nothing else in the world is afraid of laughter.' He has also stated his belief that 'everything which runs counter to the ideals of our society must be ridiculed by means of comedy.'

The way in which Eisenstein and Alexandrov 'wrote' their scripts has been described by Ivor Montagu, who worked with them in Hollywood on the scenarios of *Sutter's Gold* and *An American Tragedy*. 'Eisenstein would be closeted with "Grisha", narrating verbally the treatment he had







'Jazz Comedy' (1934)

planned. "Grisha" would go off and write it. As soon as it was written it would be typed and translated. I would take an English text, read it and go to Eisenstein. Now he and I would go through it, discussing and making emendations. Then I would go off and rewrite it.' Certainly this seems, both on the available evidence and on memory, to have been the normal pattern. Eisenstein 'planned' each treatment, discussing it with Alexandrov, who then went away and 'wrote' it.

In 1932 Eisenstein, Alexandrov and Tisse returned to Moscow from their journey to Western Europe, the U.S.A. and Mexico. For Eisenstein the next six years were a time of creative frustration whose impact was modified by his success as a theoretician and teacher. Yet it was in those dark years of the

1930s that Alexandrov prospered; not with films of 'socialist realism' but with comedy musicals that owed much more to the spirit of Proletkult and FEKS than to the repressive cultural policy of the time.

Eisenstein had proposed a satirical comedy in which 'the Russian Boyars would be transplanted into the life of modern Moscow', but it was turned down. He was offered a musical comedy but this he refused to accept. It was then suggested to Alexandrov, who at once agreed, and *Jazz Comedy* was born. Jay Leyda, who was in Moscow at the time, noted in his diary that 'Alexandrov's visits to Eisenstein now became more rare. Shumyatsky—the new Administrator of the Soviet cinema—had proposed to him the same idea that Eisenstein had rejected, and he accepted it without

consulting Eisenstein.' This is true, but its implications are probably exaggerated. In his biography of Eisenstein, Yon Barna noted that 'Eisenstein contributed to the production of *Jazz Comedy* with scenographic ideas; sketches by him for comic musical instruments in the film, for instance, survive in the Eisenstein Archive.'

Alexandrov has always defended his decision: 'I had been working with Eisenstein for 13 years, and it was my experience with him that told me the direction in which my talent should take me. It was also my belief, in the 1930s, that film comedy could help to create the ideals of humanity and justice that we all professed to believe. Any comic work in any genre should be both funny and life-asserting, and the conflict that existed between our social ideas and the evils that still existed in our Soviet society was surely the basis for conflict in comedy, and to achieve its aims our work had to use the weapon of laughter.'

*Jazz Comedy*, about a young Caucasian shepherd who becomes the conductor of a Moscow jazz band, owed a great deal to Alexandrov's favourite Western directors, from Buñuel to Chaplin, as well as to the Russian eccentrics of the 1920s. With the enthusiastic support of his cameraman, Vladimir Nilsen (one of Tisse's assistants on *October*), he experimented with animation, combination-photography, models and glass-shots. In *Jazz Comedy*, for the first time in the USSR, sequences were shot to pre-recorded music, and the imaginative use of sound owed a great deal to the Manifesto on 'Sound and Image' that Alexandrov had signed with Eisenstein and Pudovkin in 1928: 'Only the use of sound as counterpoint to visual montage offers new possibilities of developing and perfecting montage. The first experiments with sound must be directed towards its "non-coincidence" with visual images.'

The parts of *Jazz Comedy* are greater than the whole, and the film is largely remembered for its individual sequences. A fashionable dinner party is invaded by a gang of pigs, and farm animals, entranced by the rhythm of jazz, dance to the beat of the orchestra. Lybov Orlova, who became Alexandrov's wife, was such an attractive heroine that she became the most popular 'star' in the Soviet cinema, and Dunayevsky's music had an immediate appeal. Maxim Gorky praised the film highly, and Chaplin announced that Alexandrov 'was opening up a new Russia for America, a land where people were cheerful, and laughed.'

His next film, *Circus* (1936), was made when Eisenstein was enduring the agonies of *Bezhin Meadow*, which was suppressed before its shooting was completed. Tougher in theme than the generally amiable *Jazz Comedy*, *Circus* came closer to Alexandrov's own vision of comedy: 'Comedy is a political art. It is art used as self-criticism. A nation that is not afraid to make comedies is by definition not afraid to criticise its own society.' *Circus* is essentially an attack on racial intolerance, a relevant theme in a land with 170 nationalities. Its central figure is a circus performer who narrowly escapes lynching because she has a coloured baby. She is helped by a German impresario who takes her to Moscow as a star in the State Circus. There he exploits her by threatening





to expose her as the mother of a coloured child—a threat he carries out when she falls in love with a Russian. The impresario runs into the ring with the coloured boy and discloses the mother's secret to the audience. But the audience laughs, and sings a lullaby to the boy. Members of different nationalities take the child, and sing to him in their own languages. The impresario is defeated. Humanity has produced justice.

*Circus* is a good example of both the strength and weakness of Alexandrov's position. Its merits are those of a constructive sincerity and a cheerful optimism at a time of political and social gloom. It avoids the blunder of open political propaganda, and admits that racial prejudice exists, even in a Communist society. In the end it implies, rather naively, that all will be well, but at least it has the courage to suggest areas of improvement. As in *Jazz Comedy* the leading part was played by Lybov Orlova, and the music was by Dunayevsky. Both Orlova and Dunayevsky were now part of what Alexandrov refers to as his own 'Collective'.

In both *Jazz Comedy* and *Circus* he had shown that the skills and enthusiasms of Moscow in the 20s—the Proletkult, the circus, the 'eccentrics'—had a great deal in common with those of René Clair, whom he had met on the set of *Sous les Toits de Paris*, and of Chaplin, who was working on *City Lights* when Alexandrov was in Hollywood. Yet there was a sense in which his admiration for the sophisticated techniques of Paris and California seemed to cut him off from his own background. *Jazz Comedy* and *Circus* had themes so general that they could have been located in almost any country, a fault that he corrected vigorously in his next and certainly his best comedy/musical, *Volga Volga* (1938). For the first time since he began to direct films on his own he made a work that was both Russian in spirit and socialist in outlook.

*Volga Volga* is a simple tale. Byvalov, the manager of a balalaika factory near the shores of the Volga, is invited to enter a team for a Moscow Musical Olympiad. He has no faith in local non-theatrical talent, but is pestered by Trubyshtkin, the leader of the village operatic society, and his postgirl sweetheart Strelka, who leads the village light musical society. Byvalov agrees to take Trubyshtkin, and they leave for Moscow on an ancient paddle boat. Strelka and her troupe refuse to accept defeat, and leave for Moscow on a vintage sailing boat. Both boats become stranded in mid-Volga, miles from anywhere, and copies of the song written by Strelka are blown away in the wind, mysteriously reach Moscow, and become a popular hit. When Strelka arrives in the capital she is suspected of plagiarism but in the end, inevitably, she wins the day.

Naive? Of course, but then so are the plots of most musicals. The merits of *Volga Volga*, apart from its technical qualities, lie much deeper than the plot. Byvalov may be no more than a local factory manager, but he reflects the weaknesses of a whole bureaucracy. The film was made at a time when increased efforts were being made to encourage theatrical talent among non-theatrical workers—amateur dancers and singers who were really farmers, miners or, like Strelka, on the staff of a country post office. The same theme lay behind *Jazz Comedy*, but was never developed. *Volga*

shared the optimism of *Circus*, but less naively. The enemy, Byvalov, was more formidable than the German impresario because he was a native autocrat, and the film gained immeasurably from its completely 'Russian' setting. Alexandrov, it seemed, had transferred the spirit and the mood of the 20s to the tougher atmosphere of 1938.

Sadly, it was a success he never repeated. *Bright Path* (1940) was a socialist and superficial adaptation of the Cinderella story, and *Spring* (1947), a failure both with audiences and critics, was his last comedy/musical. *Meeting on the Elbe* (1949), despite the presence as cameraman of Eduard Tisse, was a routine story about former Nazi 'black marketeers' and Russian and American troops on the East/West frontier of Germany. Its central figures are the two commandants, and much is made of the friendship that springs up between them. In 1952 Alexandrov made *The Composer Glinka*, with Tisse again as cameraman, an amiable biography that contained a good deal more documentary truth than any Hollywood 'biopic', but whose main interest is the appearance of the pianist Svyatoslav Richter as Liszt. *Russian Souvenir* (1960) is a work that looks tired and dull; and his last film, *Starling and Lyre*, although shot seven years ago in Estonia and Bavaria as well as in Moscow—the names in the title are the code words of Soviet and German secret agents—has never been shown. No reason has been officially given, but I was told in Moscow that its theme was regarded as 'tactless' in this new age of détente. What seems likely is that changes were asked for, and have been prevented by the death in 1976 of Lybov Orlova, who starred in it, as she had starred in all her husband's feature films.

Any assessment of 'Grisha' Alexandrov's contribution to the cinema would be unfair unless it mentioned his talents as an administrator and diplomat. Many members of various professional 'Collectives' have vouched for his abilities as an organiser;

without him films like *Battleship Potemkin*, *October* and *The General Line* might well have collapsed. In 1944 he became an active member of a government-appointed 'Artistic Council' to plan all film production (other members included Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Romm and Shostakovich), and at the same time he succeeded Eisenstein as the artistic head of Mosfilm, a position he held until 1948. Since then he has never been far removed from positions of creative influence in Soviet film-making.

Are critics right in their general attitude towards Alexandrov, which is to denigrate him by ignoring him completely, or else dismiss him as someone whose only contribution to film history was his 'assistance' to Eisenstein? If it is obvious from this essay that I disagree with them, it must also be clear that he can hardly be regarded as one of the greatest creative artists in his own medium; but it is certainly arguable that he has been, and still is, one of the most influential. Perhaps he has paid a price for his loyalty to the principle of the 'Collective'. Perhaps he really has been too 'moderate and modest'. Perhaps he has offended the political purists by preferring to make films than to fight ideological battles that he could never hope to win, though every film that bears his name can fairly be called 'politically progressive', and not one of them suggests the work of a cowardly puppet.

Perhaps his greatest 'crime' has been his passionate wish to communicate as directly as possible with his enormous audience. If so, then let me allow him the last word: 'Because the creative artist is in advance of his audience, he must make concessions to his audience. Ideally the artist should make no concession—and this is a common attitude among Western intellectuals. But if no concession is made, then mass audiences will forever remain half a century behind the contemporary creative artists, as they are today. But if some concessions are made, the gap between artist and audience will be lessened, and perhaps even eliminated.' ■

G. V. Alexandrov in 1970, with the actor Maxim Straukh







Everyone is aware that one of the earliest film-makers of all time was the Frenchman Georges Méliès, who, under the name of the Star Film Company, produced over 500 short films between 1896 and 1912. It is less well known that in 1903 Georges' older brother, Gaston Méliès, went from Paris to New York to represent the Star Film Company in America. Not only that, but from 1909 to 1913 Gaston himself produced more than 150 one-reel films in the United States.

Before the turn of the century Georges Méliès, a performing illusionist at his Théâtre Robert Houdin in Paris, had begun making films as a novel extension of his 'magic' acts. His productions, notably *A Trip to the Moon*, an outrageous lunar fantasy of 1902, were so charming and comical that they became immensely successful wherever they were shown, including America. The film business in the United States at that time was wide open, trying to find its way, and there was no international legal control over a film producer buying a print of a popular film, duplicating it in quantities, and selling it (all films were sold, not rented) as his own. Méliès was so far away from possible legal action that some of his films were being copied in New York. The Lubin Company was one producer that obliterated the Star Film logotype from the prints and sold them as Lubin productions. By 1902, word of this film piracy got back to Georges in Paris.

Patrick McInroy

# THE AMERICAN



Top: Gaston Méliès in costume for 'The Immortal Alamo'. Above: in production at San Antonio. William Carroll, Francis Ford, Edith Storey and Anna Nichols over an unidentified patient. In right foreground, Gaston Méliès, William Paley, William Haddock. Note tarpaulin above 'outdoor interior' to control direct sunlight when necessary



Gaston, nine years older than Georges, had been managing their late father's shoe manufacturing business in London. As the result of a sudden increase that year in the price of leather, Gaston lost an important contract for army boots with the British government and returned to Paris, leaving the business bankrupt. A year earlier, in 1901, his wife had died. All these events came together to put Gaston into the film business. Georges needed someone to represent his Star Film Company in New York, not only to prevent the practice of illegal duping but to promote the sale of his films to American distributors and exhibitors. Gaston had business experience, was out of work and a widower. The deal was struck, and in December 1902 Gaston, then fifty years old, and his son Paul, 23, sailed for New York.

Between 1903 and 1909, the Star Film Company of Paris had its New York branch at 204 E.38th Street, Manhattan. Shortly after arriving, Gaston issued the following warning: 'CAUTION: Georges Méliès . . . is the originator of the class of cinematographic

# MELIÈS

films which are made from artificially arranged scenes, the creation of which has given new life to the trade at a time when it was dying out. He conceived the idea of portraying magical and mystical views, and his creations have been imitated without success ever since. A great number of French, English and American manufacturers of films who are searching for novelties, but lack the ingenuity to produce them, have found it easier and more economical to advertise their poor copies as their own original conceptions. This accounts for the simultaneous appearance in several issues of a well known New York paper of advertisements of the celebrated *Trip to the Moon* by four or five different concerns, each pretending to be its creator. All these pretensions are false. The *Trip to the Moon* as well as *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Astronomer's Dream*, *Cinderella*, *Red Riding Hood*, *The Blue Beard*, *Joan of Arc*, *Christmas Dream*, etc., are the personal creations of Mr. George Méliès, who himself conceived the ideas, painted the accessories, and acted on the stage. In opening a factory and offices in New York we are prepared and determined energetically to pursue all counterfeiters and pirates. We will not speak twice; we will act!'—Gaston Méliès, General Manager.

But by 1909 the number of films produced by Georges had dwindled considerably. Movies had become big business over much of the world, and the trend was to consolidate distribution and to rent films rather than sell them. Georges balked at the loss of his cottage film shop into a combine, and retreated to his first love, the Théâtre Robert Houdin. In 1908 he had completed 68 films, but in 1909 he produced only seven.

Meanwhile Gaston, having been given power of attorney for all American dealings concerning Star films, had agreed to join the

Motion Picture Patents Company. The MPPC was formed in 1908 by a group of motion picture 'manufacturers', as they called themselves, to monopolise the film business. Edison, Biograph, Vitagraph, Lubin, Selig, Kalem, Essanay, Méliès, Pathé and Kleine (a distributor) hoped to force all others out of the industry by the legal means of Edison's patent on the 'Latham loop' device, used in most ciné cameras at the time. The key requirement for membership in the MPPC was that each manufacturer produce at least one reel of film weekly: a complete, 1000-foot movie. Even though Georges' output had slowed to a trickle, Gaston the businessman was not going to miss out on a share in a monopoly. With Georges' sanction, he got financial backing to begin his own production in the United States.

After a false start in Chicago, Gaston began shooting on location at Fort Lee, New Jersey, and in a studio at Brooklyn during the fall of 1909. It is likely that Gaston began with some help from the Vitagraph company, since he had given Vitagraph the European rights to all the films he would produce and had borrowed several leading actors from them. With an eye towards self-promotion as well as the results of the contest, Gaston staged a screenwriting competition, advertising in trade publications: 'To commemorate the opening of his New York Studio, Mr. Méliès offers \$450 for scenarios for Moving Picture Plays; Farcical, Comical, Dramatic, Melodramatic, or Spectacular. First Prize: \$150. Second Prize: \$75. Third Prize: \$50.'

While over 600 entries were being judged, Gaston had already begun shooting at Fort Lee. His first Star dramatic production in America was *The Stolen Wireless*, released on 13 October 1909. In content, it was as far from his brother's *A Trip to the Moon* as the moon itself. American audiences were looking for adventure tales, cowboy stories, war epics, romantic melodramas. Gaston seemed to have no artistic longings to satisfy, and he wasn't in the least inclined to visual trickery. He was out to fulfil his MPPC quota with the most popular films he could produce.

Once the winners of the 'photoplay' contest were announced in trade journal advertisements, the first two winning scripts were indeed produced and distributed: *Red Star Inn* and *Baseball, That's All*. The third prize winner, with a script titled *The Fiend of the Castle*, was Florence Turner, the actress who was to become famous in 1911 as 'The Vitagraph Girl'. Gaston never produced her script, at least under that title, but presumably she collected her \$50. One of the judges of the event was Wallace McCutcheon, listed as 'a producer for the Méliès Company'. McCutcheon had been an early director for the Biograph Company, and was replaced in the summer of 1908, because of illness, by one of his actors, David Wark Griffith.

In all, Gaston put only five films into distribution during his beginnings in 1909. They were received with so-so reviews in the trade press. Interestingly, the most negative reviews for Star Films in that year were for those few productions that came from Georges Méliès in Paris. An editorial in *Moving Picture World* read: 'A careful study of the pictures that Mr. Méliès has released in the last few weeks shows us a practised mind at work in the productions, which, however, are not handled with that sureness of touch

which makes for instant success in the American moving picture theatre today. Generally speaking, there is too much confusing detail of action put in the Méliès productions, so that the main thread of the story is obscured.' The three films cited by the reviewer were *A Count's Wooing*, *A Tumultuous Elopement* and *Mr. and Mrs. Duff*. These were quite likely the last Georges Méliès films placed in distribution by the Star Film Company in the United States. Gaston, however, not only knew that American movie fans wanted a simple story line, he knew where they wanted to see it: in the saga of the West, the cowboy and Indian film.

It would seem that the start of 1910 marked the real beginning of film production for Gaston and the beginning of the end for that of Georges. In a New Year's Day editorial, *Film Index* reported an observation made by William Selig while in Europe during 1909: 'Mr. (Georges) Méliès has quite a nice plant, but was not doing anything at the time except building illusions for stage purposes. He intended, very shortly, to begin making negatives.\* Only a few negatives showed up during the whole of 1910. But in the same issue of *Film Index*, an editorial round-up of 1909 stated: 'The year has also brought renewed activity on the part of the George Méliès company, which has established an American studio and from which interesting developments are expected.'

For reasons reported as 'alterations being made in his Brooklyn studio', Gaston suspended production in December 1909. But on 22 January 1910, the *Film Index* reported that 'Wallace McCutcheon, a pioneer in this business, and now manager of the producing department of the firm of Geo. Méliès of Paris, France, and Paul G. Méliès, son of the head of the New York branch, reached San Antonio, Texas, for the making of silent dramas and comedies. The actors will arrive shortly from New York City.' In an interview with the *San Antonio Express*, McCutcheon said the move to San Antonio was made because of its sunshine, its historical background, which the company intended to research, script and film, and its proximity to the U.S. Army's Fort Sam Houston, whose troops it hoped to utilise in the making of military epics. Some of the Méliès actors had in fact left New York by boat on 29 December 1909, and included Francis Ford (older brother of John Ford), Dolly Larkin and Hector Dion, who came from Vitagraph as a director.

Once the quarters were settled in the southern outskirts of San Antonio, near a sulphur springs resort called Hot Wells Hotel, Paul Méliès began building the necessities for the production company. A ranch house was leased, along with several acres of raw brush country, and was named the Star Film Ranch. The cast and crew were based at the hotel and at private homes in the area. Paul Méliès and Ford scouted for cowhands and horses to stock the ranch, for it was their intention to build a repertory company of professional actors and professional cowboys who would all ride and act in the Méliès versions of the great American Western movie.

Francis Ford and Dolly Larkin had both

\* All films at the time were shot on negative nitrate stock.



stage and screen experience. Ford had been a make-up man for the New York stage, and had acted for Edison, Vitagraph and the New York Motion Picture Company. They were eventually joined in San Antonio by Edith Storey, William Clifford (né Clifford Williams) and William Carroll, all from Vitagraph; Henry Stanley (né Orlando Pegrarn), Anna Nichols, Mildred Bracken and Bert Bracken, Sam Weil, Joseph Karle, Richard Stanton, Fanny Midgley and Evelyn 'Jet' Selbie. All these actors were experienced on stage or screen or both. Gaston was out to meet his MPPC quota with popular films, but he planned to do so with people who knew what they were doing. To make that position even more secure, he had hired William Paley as cameraman. Paley had been a war cinematographer at San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American war, and a partner in Paley and Steiner, a film production company in New York in 1904. Horace 'Scottie' Young came along with the company as scenic designer.

Notable among the real cowboys who joined the Méliès troupe in San Antonio was Otto Meyer, the 'straw boss'. Meyer had ridden with the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show, had won numerous rodeo prizes, apparently could perform any trick imaginable on a horse, and was also a master at trick pistol shooting. The Star Film Ranch was not for drugstore cowboys; it was organised by Meyer as a place for thorough-going pros in the saddle. Among the hands that signed on with Méliès were 'Big Bill' Gittinger, Joe Flores, Eugene Flournoy, Harry Knight, Ben and Sep Cooper, Frank Fernandez, Jr. and John Ortega. It seems unlikely that any of this bunch, mostly locals from the San Antonio area, could imagine that one day he might be looking for work around the Hollywood film studios. Before production began, Gaston himself came to San Antonio with his young wife of two years, Hortense, who was a cousin of Sarah Bernhardt. Paul returned to the New York office.

The first one-reeler from Texas, *Cyclone Pete's Matrimony*, was not released by Méliès until 10 April 1910, and was advertised to the trade several weeks earlier: 'A wild Western

comedy concerning a cowboy with the marrying fever... The hero is endowed with all the bravado which is supposed to actuate the untamed cowboy, but he is completely tamed by his schoolmarm wife, whom he attempts to bullyrag. The matrimonial experiences of Cyclone Pete are framed in a picturesque setting of wild Texas scenery and characters.' 'All our Western pictures,' said the promotional copy, 'possess the atmosphere of the West. Genuine cowboys and Mexicans, and real cow ponies... taken by our stock company of actors and producers, now in Texas.' *Cyclone Pete's Matrimony* was the first of a number of Méliès Western comedies directed by William Haddock, who replaced Hector Dion as director before production began. Haddock had been a director for the American branch of Kinemacolor, a British company producing early two-colour process films from Whitestone Landing, Long Island. He had also worked for Méliès at Fort Lee.

It is not certain why San Antonio was chosen for Méliès' Westerns. The popular notion is that film companies moved west from New York to escape the MPPC 'detectives'—goons hired by the trust to break up production by non-licensed companies. This couldn't apply to Méliès, as he was a 'licensed' member of the trust. The sunny weather of the area certainly must have figured in the decision, and the natural settings and props. The Ranch was next to a winding river, with several swinging bridges. Thus, *A Rough Night at the Bridge* concerned a young man who drank a few too many at the hotel, failed to negotiate the rope bridge and wound up in the river. It was also close to the ruins of San José mission, which inspired *In the Mission Shadows* and *The Padre's Secret*. A railroad was being built nearby, and several dramas were written around that event.

The sources for the screenplays, apart from improvisation around given props and locations, could have come from popular fiction. Years later, Haddock was specific about story ideas: 'Boy, the *Saturday Evening Post* was our bible.' But Méliès' trade press publicity, coming from New York, was

somewhat loftier: 'The Méliès company has been supplied with a number of scenarios from the pen of a well-known theatrical writer. He is familiar with Texas topography, having been in that section in advance of theatrical attractions; and so his dramas and comedies have been written with an eye to utilising the best that Texas could afford.'

Haddock was known in the business as a 'comedy director', and during his stay with Méliès comedies were produced in greater proportion as the company's output grew. Generally, the Méliès (Haddock) Western comedies fell into one of three categories of story line:

1. The rube in the prairie, in which a city bird gets taken for a ride by a bunch of fun-loving cowhands (*Sir Percy and the Punchers*, 1911).
2. Country courting: the shy cowboy and his sweetheart (*Cyclone Pete's Matrimony*, 1910).
3. The matriarchal West: woman gets the better of man (*When the Tables Turned*, 1911).

Many of these stories were not period Westerns, but contemporary for 1910. The West was still a bit woolly, and life in a small Texas town or on a ranch was not greatly affected by modern, big-city ways. In many of the Méliès films cowhands were not gun-toting hombres, but boisterous roughhouse wranglers, just as they were in real life. Nothing held higher esteem than a well-executed practical joke. Meyer's bunch had years of experience at the craft, and Haddock built one-reel comedies round their skill at poking fun.

Not all the films were Westerns: San Antonio was a city of nearly 100,000 and provided settings for standard urban dramas. Gaston was known to exchange the use of a location for a print of the resulting film, or else include some of the owner's family in the cast of extras. As predicted by Wallace McCutcheon, there were also military epics, and indeed the troops from Fort Sam Houston were cast, particularly the cavalry. *Under the Stars and Bars*, a Civil War story, was praised by a reviewer in *Moving Picture World* for its realistic destruction of Vicksburg. Fort Sam Houston soldiers were employed, as they were in *Loves, C.Q.D.*, another Civil War drama that starred a telegraph key.

From the beginning of his production in America, Gaston regularly sent cheques in the amount of the Star Film profits to Georges Méliès in Paris. Georges had produced only fifteen short films in 1910, and those were distributed through the Gaumont Company, not the MPPC distribution channel, General Film Exchange. According to Madeleine Malthête-Méliès, Georges' granddaughter, the money received from Gaston each month went into the operation of the Théâtre Robert Houdin. But in November 1910, approximately a year after Gaston's production had begun in the United States, he sent his last cheque to Georges, and never again communicated with him. Apparently Gaston reasoned that it was his own energies and business ability that had kept the money flowing in, as Georges most certainly wasn't concerned about filling the MPPC quota of one reel a week. Reasoning that he was now in business for himself, Gaston eventually replaced the Star Film logotype with his own,

'An Unwilling Cowboy': Henry Stanley plays the city dude in this comedy Western of 1911



G. Méliès  
Star Films.

AN UNWILLING COWBOY—No. 5.

On his way to stop the marriage he falls into the river and he is rescued by the cowboys.





Foreground, middleground and background orchestration in 'The Immortal Alamo'. At right front, William Clifford and Edith Storey

a horseshoe bearing the name 'G. Méliès' surrounding a drawing of a horse's head. Near the end of his production, in 1913, he signed his advertisements 'Méliès Films', but his own full name never appeared in an ad except the call for entries in the screenwriting competition of 1909. As late as 1911, *Moving Picture World* carried a short enquiry from a reader who wondered if the Méliès cowboy films were made by the same Méliès who had produced *A Trip to the Moon*.

In the spring of 1911, Gaston Méliès was about to lose his lease on the land at the Star Film Ranch. His director, Haddock, was reported to be looking for a new location north of San Antonio, near Kerrville. At this time, however, Southern California was attracting more and more film companies to its predictably mild climate and abundant sunshine, while the intense summer heat in San Antonio was a bit taxing for the Méliès troupe. It would seem that Gaston and his company of 'picture players' decided that if they were to close the corral of the Film Ranch and pack up wardrobe and props, they might consider moving to the Pacific seashore. Of course, it wasn't a whim that made the troupe leave San Antonio on 22 April 1911, for Santa Paula, California. Gaston was no romantic, at least about his business. He was a film 'manufacturer', and it is safe to say that he had a good deal of his new location already lined up and waiting for him before he left.

One of his last productions in San Antonio was *The Immortal Alamo*. McCutcheon had hinted that this was to be one of the special projects of the Méliès company, and Gaston engaged the services of the Peacock Military

Academy, a San Antonio prep school that trained its pupils in cavalry manoeuvres and owned its own stables. Scores of older pupils played the parts of the Mexican troops attacking the fortress. One of the children of the Peacock family was given the part of an infant within the Alamo.

As he left for California, Gaston lost one of his stars. Edith Storey, who had been on loan from Vitagraph, returned to that company in New York. Storey had a beguiling film presence, and 1911 was the year that virtually all the film companies began giving screen credit, by name, to their players. By 1915, Edith Storey was judged to be among the top five actresses by readers of *Motion Picture Story* magazine.

When the Méliès players arrived in Ventura county, California, it was front page news for the *Santa Paula Chronicle's* issue of 5 May 1911: 'Sulphur Mountain Springs to be setting for Picture Dramas.' Like the Hot Wells, Sulphur Mountain Springs was a resort, just outside Santa Paula, a small pleasant community built upon its surrounding citrus farms. The cast and crew stayed in rough cabins, and much of the filming was done on the range of the adjoining Dietz ranch. The story around town was that Dietz was Gaston's brother-in-law, a relative of a German lens maker whom Méliès had known in Europe. In 1911, theatre people were not readily accepted as neighbours, and movie people were not even up to the social level of theatre people. Méliès, of course, was aware of this, and so to introduce his troupe to the townsfolk in a favourable way, he presented a 4th of July celebration at the Springs. A full-page ad in the *Chronicle* announced the event, at which all Santa Paula

residents were invited to come and see how a moving picture was made. It included the actors in outlandish wardrobe and the cowboys doing their riding, roping and shooting tricks, and it was a grand success.

The first Star productions filmed from Sulphur Mountain Springs were *The Great Heart of the West* and *The Strike at the Gringo*, both released in July 1911. But Gaston's company of players began to break up soon after his arrival. The repertory system of organisation within film companies was still very much dominant, but there were no unions or guilds, and pay was slight. Once actors and technicians came into contact with others of their craft, they heard of other jobs. William Haddock left in late July 1911 to make connections with the Eclair company, and soon after was directing Western comedies for them at Pawnee, Oklahoma. He was replaced by director Robert Goodman of Atlanta, Georgia. William Paley went with Nestor, a company he was later to sue because of an accident that eventually cost him the amputation of a foot. By November 1911, William Clifford, William Carroll and Francis Ford had left Méliès and gone to work for Bison, a brand name of the New York Motion Picture Company, located first at Los Angeles, then at Santa Monica under the direction of Thomas Ince.

Once Haddock left, Méliès' productions turned almost exclusively to melodramas, with few comedies or war stories: *His Terrible Lesson*, *A Spanish Love Song*, *Call of the Wilderness*, *The Mission Waif*. In their column, 'Reviews of Notable Films', *Moving Picture World* gave an excellent notice to *The Mission Waif*, claiming it to be the best Méliès production since *The Immortal Alamo*.



By 1911, however, there was considerable talk in the trade about the subject matter of movies. Themes and settings were repeated and repeated, film after film. Although the moving picture audience was enormous and enthusiastic, trade magazine editors urged the film companies to find new material. In particular, they attacked the Western drama as having run its course. The same banal cowboy-Indian-villain-rescue-love tale must be replaced by something, or the audiences would grow bored with moving pictures as they had in 1900, before the development of the story film.

Gaston was no doubt aware of such a possibility. As a businessman who had dealt with changing fashions in footwear, he had a keen eye for anticipating trends in public taste. Also, he had seen the popularity of Georges' films dwindle, possibly because the world had become too familiar with his trick photography. On top of this, the star system was beginning to flower in movies, which meant increased operating costs. Gaston put all these factors together and decided upon a plan for a change in his company.\* With Hortense, he made a trip in November 1911 to New York, where he visited the French consulate. His purpose was to obtain a letter of introduction to the governor of Tahiti, for he had determined that Papeete was to be the first stop on a planned tour 'around the world'. During the trip, he would produce 'scenics' (travelogues), as well as dramas written to suit the various countries visited.

*Moving Picture World* reported on 2 December that Gaston and Hortense were on their way back to California with some 'new faces', presumably actors. They also reported that he had disbanded his West Coast troupe and was forming another, but had already filmed enough negatives to meet his MPPC quota for six months. When Méliès and his wife arrived back in Santa Paula in the second week of December 1911, they left the Sulphur Mountain Springs resort and bought a house at 7th and Main streets in downtown Santa Paula. The South Seas trip was six months away, possibly planned around weather conditions, and Gaston needed a studio to keep his production moving until then. He hired a new director, Willis L. Robards.

During the first months of 1912, Gaston cranked out his quota of one-reelers in and around Santa Paula. They were mostly the formula Western stuff that was being filmed by other companies in the West: *The Outlaw and the Baby*, *Dodging the Sheriff*, *Cowboy vs. Tenderfoot*, *Sheriff's Daughter*, *The Rustler's Daughter*, *Ghost of Sulphur Mountain*, *Ghosts at Circle X Camp*, *Troubles of the XL Outfit*. One trade publication commented on an unusual Méliès innovation: children as stars in Western films. Gaston had used young people before the camera in San Antonio, and had featured a youngster in *Tommy's Rocking Horse* at Sulphur Mountain Springs. In 1912 he released *The Cowboy Kid*, starring 'the world's smallest, youngest cowboy', who was eight-year-old Danny Reulos. Danny was the little brother of Hortense Méliès, making him the brother-in-law of Gaston, then 61 years old.

The company must have shot film at quite

a pace during those months, as Gaston had to put away a store of negatives to back up his forthcoming South Seas venture. In May, just before leaving Santa Paula, he made a trip to Catalina Island and canned a number of tales built around the locale: *A Romance at Catalina*, *The Beachcombers*, *Judgments of the Sea*, *The Castaway*, *Tempest Tossed*, *Eileen of the Sea*. At least one of these Catalina Island one-reelers still exists. *Molly's Mistake* concerns the simple life and love shared by a fisherman and his young wife on a sparsely inhabited island. A group of students come from the mainland for a visit and Molly, enticed into sharing some champagne, yields to one fellow's suggestion to go away with him. Molly's husband returns from his day's fishing to find her gone, but on the boat Molly's champagne high wears off quickly when the young man tries some unseemly advances. She realises her mistake and demands to be returned to the island, where she is forgiven by her husband, and the fishing life resumes.

Near the end of July, Paul Méliès and his wife spent a few days with Gaston and Hortense at Santa Paula, then left for San Francisco with the cast and crew that had signed on for the film voyage. Bert Bracken was now to direct; the cameraman for the dramas was Hugh McCluny, and for the 'scenics', George Scott. The writer was Edmund Mitchell, and Sam Weil was stage manager. The cast included Mildred Bracken, Fanny Midgley, Henry Stanley and John Ortega. On 24 July 1912, this troupe sailed from San Francisco on the steamer S.S. Manuka, bound for Tahiti. Filming had already begun, as Gaston had the notion of making a story built round the trip itself. It was a comedy called *The Misfortunes of Mr. and Mrs. Mott on their Trip to Tahiti*, and starred Fanny Midgley and Henry Stanley in the title parts. *Moving Picture World* noted that it caused considerable laughter from the audience, but was 'a not very substantial picture'.

Fanny Midgley wrote to a friend in Santa Paula that the company had arrived in Papeete about a month after leaving San Francisco. Governor Girard of Tahiti had given Gaston *carte blanche*, and in spite of rainy weather, the group completed the filming of *The Upa Upa Dance*, *A Ballad of the South Seas*, *A Tale of Old Tahiti* and *Unmasked by a Kanaka*. Gaston reported that the natives at Papeete were much more civilised in appearance than he had expected, and to get views of primitive life he had decided to travel to inland Tahiti. He also noted that the inhabitants were so taken with American cowboy clothing that the entire troupe had begun wearing Western gear.

From there, Méliès 'Round the World Films', as they were advertised, went to New Zealand and Australia. But troubles set in. There was a problem in finding pure water to develop the negatives, and the humidity and temperature of the islands damaged some of the nitrate film stock they sent back to Paul Méliès in New York. Using the one-reelers shot in reserve at Santa Paula and Catalina, the company was able to keep its quota of production, but just barely. Then, other problems. Something happened to Bert Bracken, perhaps his heavy drinking, and he had to be replaced by January 1913. Robert Goodman was cabled to join the company as director at Surabaya, Java, as soon as

possible, but he declined. In February 1913, Fanny Midgley became seriously ill at Saigon, and later returned to Santa Paula; by April, Mildred Bracken had also left the company and was back in Santa Paula for a visit before beginning a new job with the Broncho company, a Universal brand, in Los Angeles.

Méliès pressed on, building a few stories around natives and using non-actors, but mainly shooting little documentaries of whatever unusual activities he came upon in each country: *Diving for Pearl Oysters at Thursday Island*, *A Japanese Funeral*, *A Cambodian Idyll*, *Shooting the Famous Hozu Rapids in Japan*, *A Trip to the Famous Picnic Grounds at Arashiyama, Japan*. For several issues, the trade press carried advertisements for a 3-reel 'feature' titled *The Yellow Slave*, presenting 'a Japanese girl's supreme sacrifice, enacted entirely by Japanese players of prominence at the G. Méliès studio, Yokohama, Japan.' But *The Yellow Slave* was never shot, or never completed, or never processed. At any rate, it was never released in the United States.

On 6 June 1913, the *Santa Paula Chronicle* reported that Mr. and Mrs. G. Méliès were back at their home on W. Main street: 'We understand that they intend to sell their property here and return to France, where M. Méliès will write a book on the interesting trip around the world.' In August the *Chronicle* reported: 'The Méliès moving picture studio, grounds, stage and settings, located on West Main street in Santa Paula, have been sold to the St. Louis Motion Picture Company. The purchasing company has been located at Albuquerque, New Mexico. The president is O. E. Goebel, and W. L. Robards, formerly with the Méliès company, is a writer of scenarios with the St. Louis company.'

Gaston travelled to Algeria, then to Corsica, where he died in 1915, of shellfish poisoning. Paul Méliès stayed on in New York for a while as a distributor for the Gaumont company. Meanwhile, back in December 1912, he had arranged with his father to sell the rights to all American-made Méliès films to the Vitagraph company, as well as rights to all Georges' films from 1903 to 1909, during the period of Gaston's distribution in the United States. That same month, Paul and his wife, Gabrielle de Luc Méliès, returned to Paris for a visit, where they were confronted by an angry Georges, who wanted to know why he had been left out of the profits since November 1910. Paul explained his father's reasoning, but Georges took legal action against Gaston and Paul. The court found against Georges, and the legal dispute was over.

As a film innovator and a creator of 'magic' on film, Georges Méliès' name will probably be around as long as film is studied. His brother Gaston will not receive the same sort of attention from historians, at least until the pivotal years of the American film industry, 1902-1914, are more thoroughly explored. However, he was one of the first in the history of motion pictures who could bring together a group of diverse, often difficult personalities for the purpose of combining technology and entertainment and business, and somehow make it all go: the working producer. As such, Gaston Méliès was also a notable pioneer. ■

\* Gaston may also have figured on the reality that the MPPC was not working as a monopoly, and its days were numbered. Moreover, by 1911 the one-reel film was on its way out.



# ORWELL AS FILM CRITIC



Jeffrey Meyers

Between October 1940 and August 1941 George Orwell wrote twenty-six film review columns—which were omitted from the four volumes of his *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*—for *Time and Tide*. This politically independent weekly magazine was edited by the lively Lady Rhondda, the plump and curly-haired daughter of a Welsh coal magnate. Most of the films Orwell reviewed were undistinguished escapist entertainment, which he mostly disapproved of and disliked. But they also included minor works by major directors: René Clair's *The Flame of New Orleans* and Fritz Lang's *Western Union*; and a few which he took more seriously: the Mormon epic *Brigham Young*, the anti-Nazi melodrama *Escape* and, most notably, Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*.

By 1940 Orwell had had an adventurous but not particularly successful life. He was born in India, had won a scholarship to Eton, served for five years in the Burma police, been down and out with the tramps of Paris and London, lived with the miners of Wigan, contracted tuberculosis, fought and been shot in the Spanish Civil War. He spent most of the 1930s writing prophetic books about the dangers of Communism and Fascism, and warning about the impending war. He had written three books of *reportage* and four novels, whose honesty and integrity earned him a respectful reputation but no money. The outbreak of war led to a period of waste and frustration. He was desperately poor, medically unfit for the army and unable to find work that would help the war effort. He published *Inside the Whale*, a collection of essays, in March 1940; and wrote the propagandist *Lion and the Unicorn* between August and October. When he completed this tract, he began reviewing films and writing the 'London Letter' for the *Partisan Review*; but abandoned his stopgap career as a film critic when he joined the Indian section of the BBC in August 1941.

Orwell's criticism was permeated by a battered idealism and powerfully influenced by the massive defeats of the Allied armies during 1939–41. The invasion of Poland; the

occupation of Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland and France; the evacuation of Dunkirk and the air raids on England; the conquest of Yugoslavia and Greece; the destruction of shipping by U-boats and the siege of Leningrad, placed all of Europe under the domination of Hitler and threatened the very existence of Britain. America had not entered the War; and the victories at Stalingrad and El Alamein were not yet in sight. Orwell's fears and hopes about the war affect all his reviews. He specifically mentions the Athenia, which was torpedoed, with 1400 people aboard, two days after the War began; Russian tank battles; and Wavell's first bright triumphs in Libya and Abyssinia in February 1941. 'What rot it all is!' he comments on *One Night in Lisbon*. 'How dare anyone present the war in these colours when thousands of tanks are battling on the plains of Poland and tired workers are slinking into the tobacconist's shop to plead humbly for a small Woodbine. And yet as current films go this is a good film.'

Orwell, who rarely mentions the directors and is not interested in film as a distinct form of art, does not write brilliantly illuminating criticism, like his contemporaries James Agee and Graham Greene. He is primarily

concerned with the political, social and moral content of films; their propaganda value; the way they reflect the progress of the war; and the difference between English and American cinema. His reviews are generally short and formulaary: an opening comment, discussion of the plot, snap judgment on the film and remarks on the cast, with particular praise for veteran English character actors like Edmund Gwenn, C. Aubrey Smith and Eric Blore. But his wit at the expense of the more tedious films shows the engaging side of his character that was also revealed in his 'As I Please' columns for *Tribune*. The top hat in *Quiet Wedding*, 'symbol throughout half the world of British plutocracy, is now only worn by schoolboys, undertakers and bank messengers.' The school in *Little Men* is 'the 1870 equivalent of Dartington Hall.' *I Married Adventure*, an African jungle film by Osa Johnson, is excellent for those 'who are distressed by the present depleted state of the Zoo.' The horrible quality of the colour in Noël Coward's *Bitter Sweet* makes the actors' faces 'marzipan pink, garish magenta and poisonous green.' (Orwell rather exaggerates, a year after *Gone With the Wind*, the general defects of colour film.)

Orwell's intensely hostile response to the manifest defects of American escapist films, which make a blank cartridge fired in a studio more exciting than the bomb that drops next door, is reinforced by his anger at the isolationist position of the United States during the first two years of the War. He assumes that English and European films are more serious if less technically expert than American ones, and condemns the sheer idiocy of the absurd plot of a romantic tear-jerker like *Waterloo Bridge*. But he is interested in the audience's response to the lively dialogue and their acceptance of the appalling banality. (He quotes a nice exchange from two women sitting behind him: 'Of course, she can't marry him after that.'—'Why can't she?'—'Well, I mean to say, she couldn't.'—'Why not? I would. I just wouldn't say anything about it.'—'No, she'll kill herself. You'll see'.)

He notes that the interest in adventure films would increase enormously if in 'five per cent of the cases the heroine did *not* escape!' He objects to the oppressive conventional morality and wryly comments that only in films do beautiful women ever starve. And in a critique of *The Lady in Question*, a remake of *La Gribouille* directed by Charles Vidor, he condemns 'the intellectual contempt which American film producers seem to feel for their audience. It is always assumed that anything demanding thought, or even suggesting thought, must be avoided like the plague. An American film actor shown reading a book always handles it in the manner of an illiterate person.' In a thriller like Tim Whelan's *A Date with Destiny* ('an old-fashioned murder story dolled up with a few "psychological" trappings for the benefit of an audience who are assumed to have heard far-off rumours of Freud'), the producers 'cannot resist denouncing the whole science of psychiatry as something sinister, wicked and probably an imposture. The moral, beloved of English-speaking audiences, is that the "intellectual" is always wrong.' What disgusts him and offends his Socialist beliefs in George Cukor's film of *The Gay Mrs. Trexel*, 'as in so many American films, is the utter lack of any



decent, intelligent vision of life . . . It does not seem to strike them that the whole manner of life which depends on Paris dresses, servants, riding horses, etc., etc., is futile in itself.'

Another distasteful aspect of American culture, which Orwell also discusses in his comparison of English and American detective novels, 'Raffles and Miss Blandish', is the gratuitous violence. For Orwell, the Raoul Walsh gangster film *High Sierra* represents the *ne plus ultra* of sadism, bully worship and gunplay, repugnantly combined with sentimentality and perverse morality: 'Humphrey Bogart is the Big Shot who smashes people in the face with the butt of his pistol and watches fellow gangsters burn to death with the casual comment, "They were only small-town guys," but is kind to dogs and is supposed to be deeply touching when he is smitten with a "pure" affection for a crippled girl, who knows nothing of his past. In the end he is killed, but we are evidently expected to sympathise with him and even to admire him.'

By contrast, he praises Henry Hathaway's unusual and more ambitious film *Brigham Young*, because 'the heroism of the Mormon pioneers is well brought out and Brigham Young's own spiritual struggles are taken seriously.' Orwell, who notes that the Mormons claimed divine inspiration, preached polygamy and were persecuted in the nineteenth century, states 'The film is an interesting example of the way in which important events lose their moral colour as they drop backwards into history. It is more or less pro-Mormon, the polygamy [Young had nineteen wives and fifty-six children] being played down as much as possible and the methods by which the Mormons secured their extra wives ignored.'

Orwell finds that the cinematic representations of English social life and history are also highly idealised. He notes that the portrayal of 'county' society in Anthony Asquith's *Quiet Wedding*, 'a charming little film, which kept the jaded press audience laughing rapturously', ignores the fact that the English gentry have lost contact with agriculture and live mainly on dividends. Yet he admires the deep charm of country life, its casualness and lack of ceremony with the feudally familiar servants; and says the film is chiefly interesting as a record of vanished time: 'for it ignores the war and seems to belong to some period before Hitler definitely filled the horizon.' The nostalgic longing for a world of peace, and the desire to establish a continuity between the England of the past and of the present, were the dominant themes of Orwell's most recent novel, *Coming Up For Air* (1939).

*This England*, a historical pageant, also sustains the myth that England is an agricultural country and that its inhabitants—who could not tell a turnip from a broccoli if they saw them growing in a field—'derive their patriotism from\* a passionate love of the English soil.' Yet he affirms that such films are probably good for morale in wartime and patriotically states (as he does in his essay on Kipling) that 'many of the events which the jingo history-books make the most noise about are things to be proud of.' Orwell believes that propaganda films are a major weapon in war and that it is vital to learn how to rouse resentment against the enemy. He criticises two British propaganda films for their amateurishness, their use

of the dreadful BBC voice 'which antagonises the whole English-speaking world,' and their failure to realise that most people are more disturbed by the destruction of a house than of a church. ('Surely we can find something more effective to say than that the Germans have a spite against Gothic architecture?')

Orwell is fascinated by the effect of war on the cinema. He notes a welcome change from the tinge of isolationist feeling in *Escape to Glory* to the sudden outbreak of Anglophilia in *Nice Girl?* He remarks that Tony, the Californian grape-grower in *They Knew What They Wanted*, is 'one of those big-hearted, child-like Italians who were favourites on the American screen before Mussolini lined up with Hitler.' He is pleased to see, in Mitchell Leisen's *Arise, My Love*, that the refusal to deal with reality and the rigid pattern of the American happy ending were finally breaking down under the intense pressure of contemporary events. Foreign politics, wars and assassinations are no longer treated—as they had been in England during the 30s—as a fantastic joke, or as material for a news 'scoop'. At the end of this film Ray Milland and Claudette Colbert survive a shipwreck and 'decide to stay in Europe and work for the defeat of Fascism. So, somewhat less rosily and more credibly than is usual in a film intended as a popular success, the story ends.'

*So Ends Our Night*, an adaptation of Erich Remarque's novel about the sacrificial death of a German refugee, directed by John Cromwell, also reveals a welcome development of political consciousness: 'Two years ago this anti-Nazi film . . . would have been impossibly highbrow and dangerously "left". It can now be safely assumed that "S.A.", "S.S.", "Ogpu", "Gestapo", etc., will convey approximately the right meanings and that the average filmgoer is somewhat ahead of the magistrate who remarked recently to a German refugee, "You must have done something wrong or they wouldn't have put you in the concentration camp."'

Orwell's critique of another anti-Nazi film, *Escape*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy, foreshadows with extraordinary clarity the even more dehumanised and dangerous world of 1984. He believes the film fails because of its unwillingness to be too 'political', and has rather unrealistic expectations of what a film might hope to portray: 'It makes play, fairly effectively, with the horror of the Gestapo, but as to why the Gestapo exists, how Hitler reached his present position, what he is trying to achieve, it utters not a word.' Though the end of the film degenerates into absurdity, the first part, which includes Bonita Granville as 'one of those spying and eavesdropping children whom all the totalitarian States specialise in producing', captures 'the nightmare atmosphere of a totalitarian country, the utter helplessness of the ordinary person, the complete disappearance of the concepts of justice and objective truth.' The 'nightmare' of 1984—which he saw in films like *Escape*—realistically portrayed the political terrorism of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, transposed into the austere landscape of wartime London.

Orwell's most substantial and significant review, which synthesises the dominant themes of his film criticism, concerns *The Great Dictator*. Orwell, who is primarily interested in the effective presentation of

serious ideas, praises the 'glorious scenes of fights against Storm Troopers which are not less, perhaps actually *more* moving because the tragedy of wrecked Jewish households is mixed up with [slapstick] humour.' He describes how the little Jewish barber is mistaken for Hynkel, the Dictator of Tomania, and says the great moment of the film occurs when the barber is surrounded by Nazi dignitaries, waiting to hear his triumphal speech: 'Instead of making the speech that is expected of him, Charlie makes a powerful fighting speech in favour of democracy, tolerance, and common decency. It is really a tremendous speech, a sort of version of Lincoln's Gettysburg address done into Hollywood English, one of the strongest pieces of propaganda I have heard for a long time.' He adds, less enthusiastically, that it has almost no connection with the rest of the film, which fades out after the speech without revealing if the oration takes effect or if the Nazis shoot the impostor.

Though Orwell believes the film is technically weak, has no more unity than a pantomime and gives the 'impression of being tied together with bits of string', he finds it deeply moving because he identifies with Chaplin's peculiar gift: 'His power to stand for a sort of concentrated essence of the common man, for the ineradicable belief in decency that exists in the hearts of ordinary people, at any rate in the West. We live in a period in which democracy is almost everywhere in retreat, super-men in control of three-quarters of the world, liberty explained away by sleek professors, Jew-baiting defended by pacifists . . . The common man is wiser than the intellectuals, just as animals are wiser than men . . . Chaplin's appeal lies in his power to reassert the fact, overlaid by Fascism and, ironically enough, by Socialism, that *vox populi* is *vox Dei* and giants are vermin.' Orwell adds that pro-Fascist writers like Wyndham Lewis (who also wrote for *Time and Tide*) have always pursued Chaplin with a venomous hatred. Lewis actually attacked Chaplin in *Time and Western Man* (1927) not for political reasons, but for popularising infantile attitudes.

Orwell concludes by affirming the propagandist value of Chaplin's films, which had been banned in Germany since Hitler (his near-twin) came to power: 'If our Government had a little more imagination they would subsidise *The Great Dictator* heavily and would make every effort to get a few copies into Germany—a thing that ought not to be beyond human ingenuity . . . The allure of power politics will be a fraction weaker for every human being who sees this film.'

Orwell's criticism is limited by the mainly uninspiring quality of the films he reviewed during 1940–41 and by his lack of interest in the theory and technique of the cinema. But his commonsensical reviews are enlivened by his exposure of Hollywood's pretensions ('Nearly all American films are intellectually pretentious . . . The synopses handed out to representatives of the press "analyse" their absurd subject-matter as though it were the work of Ibsen'), and strengthened by his social commitment and moral intensity. They reflect his values, especially the concern with his distillation of English virtues—the concept of decency. And they clearly anticipate his acute insights about the terrifying atmosphere of totalitarianism in his two masterpieces: *Animal Farm* and 1984. ■



# Film Reviews



'Manhattan': Mariel Hemingway, Woody Allen

## Manhattan

In *Take the Money and Run*, Virgil Starkwell, a punk from the neighbourhood, is regularly menaced by a larger hoodlum until, in what became one of the early Woody Allen's characteristic acts of obeisance, he anticipates humiliation, removes his own spectacles and stomps them underfoot. In *Manhattan* (United Artists), at a black-tie party for supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment, Virgil's lineal if distant descendant, the TV comedy writer Isaac Davis—who has just embarked on a serious book set in New York—declares that when it comes to Nazis marching in New Jersey, satire is useless, what is needed are bricks and baseball bats.

In the past decade, between *Take the Money and Manhattan*, Woody Allen has smoothed and toughened his jumpy screen persona. The characters he has played (and with whom, to his dismay, he has become personally identified) have, for one thing, moved up market: Fielding Mellish, in *Bananas*, was a 'product tester'; Allan Felix, in *Play It Again, Sam*, a contributor to a movie magazine; Alvy Singer, in *Annie Hall*, an acclaimed comedian. Their enduring worries have slowly been tamed. Cowardice has given way to a sort of hesitant bravado. Women still cause complications; but while once the too-liberal application of after-shave lotion triggered uncontrollable pre-date jitters, we now find Isaac Davis (Woody Allen) tussling, as befits a man in his forties, with doubts about the meaning of work and the desirability of commitment.

Success, however, has not spoiled the joshing, half self-confident Isaac: he puffs cigarettes supposedly for effect, but really only to amuse his friends with his patently bogus masculine pose. His ties, gestures, timing and turns of phrase register with gratifying familiarity. He is a peculiarly

knowing innocent and, like the most completely realised of his predecessors, a thorough-going New Yorker. Isaac's film—for one assumes that his book becomes the film *Manhattan*—opens with a sequence of shots of New York over which Allen's breathless, unmistakable voice is heard doodling with the first sentence of the first chapter. 'He adored New York City, he idolised it out of all proportion... New York was his town, and it always would be.' Imagine a similar sequence celebrating another city, and the result would probably be unwatchable.

With this humorous flourish, capped by a burst of 'Rhapsody in Blue', Allen expresses his own light-headed affection for his native town, for its movie theatres and department stores, as well as for its cramped, malfunctioning apartments and its wired, egocentric citizens. At the same time, he establishes New York as the palpable background to the action and as such the counterpoint to its hero's life. His subsequent achievement, however, has been to mesh with unexpected delicacy the background (the recurring landmarks) and the talkative content of his new but in some respects standard episodic narrative. It is as if, having delivered himself of 'serious' ambitions in *Interiors*, partly set in a vacant, over art-directed approximation of Manhattan, Allen the director found himself able to return to the live Manhattan of *Annie Hall*, freed at last from the necessity of imposing Allen the actor so abruptly on the material of Allen the screenwriter.

*Manhattan*, the most relaxed of Allen's films, skims smoothly over some artfully random moments in the lives of Isaac and his married, intellectual friend Yale (Michael Murphy), whose chief professional worry is an unwritten biography of O'Neill. Yale, it may be noted, is the latest in a line of assured WASP friends in whom our hero

regularly confides; in *Manhattan*, however, the confidant jilts the friend, and Allen gives the definitive last word to Isaac. The film charts—and we have by now seen several variations on this pirouette—the progress of Yale's adulterous affair with Mary Wilke (Diane Keaton), a 'cultural' journalist with an incongruous streak of Philadelphia propriety; Mary's subsequent liaison with Isaac; Isaac's abandonment of his 17-year-old love Tracy (Mariel Hemingway); Mary's return to Yale and Isaac's attempt to regain Tracy.

Isaac is trapped between the shadow of his past, his ferocious ex-wife Jill (Meryl Streep), and the shadow of the future, the devoted Tracy. He cannot overcome the memory of Jill abandoning him for another woman, or the fear of future difficulties occasioned by Tracy's youth and his dawning middle age. His romantic pain has a genuine base; and, whereas in *Annie Hall* one of the hero's nightmares was of Alvy the Hassid seated uncomfortably at dinner among Annie's non-Jewish relatives, in *Manhattan* a related nightmare actually comes true when Jill publishes a lurid and humiliating account of her marriage to Isaac.

The script, by Allen and his collaborator Marshall Brickman, probes most tellingly those fraught confrontations—reminiscent of Bergman in the recent past—when lovers part from former loved ones. And it attempts, with a mixture of ingenuousness, poignance and surprisingly gentle humour, to formulate some hazy moral guidelines for Allen's hedonistic, culturally omnivorous Manhattanites. The players, none of whom can be faulted, behave with relaxed familiarity; and, although Allen and Diane Keaton reaffirm their position as the current American cinema's premier ensemble (each personifies a different variety of old-world decency), it is perhaps Mariel Hemingway who is most perfectly cast as the film's touchstone and *tabula rasa*. Like Pearl, the earthmother in *Interiors*, Tracy represents, in sharp contrast to the other characters, an inviolate ideal; Tracy, however, unlike Pearl, is untouched by the world (or Manhattan values). She is a truly innocent innocent; and at the end of the film, having reached her majority, she is able—on the edge of 'corruption'—to offer Isaac a valedictory command to 'have faith in people'. She represents, like many another Allen heroine, cause for hope.

Isaac is not exactly a positive achiever, but he does find the nerve to resign from a secure job on the TV show 'Human Beings Wow!'. His ex-wife wrote that 'he longed to be an artist but balked at the necessary sacrifice'. In fact, Isaac does not balk: he accepts his responsibilities (money to two former wives, his son and his parents); adapts his lifestyle (he moves to a less commodious apartment); and actually gets on with his work (four chapters of the book are completed before the film ends).

The film's slight episodes are knitted together by a series of Gershwin tunes over punctuating establishing shots, and by Allen's sleek, self-deprecating wit and his proven but still fresh ability to coin startling metaphors and to turn jargon so satisfactorily on its head. The popularity of his talent, a detractor, Joan Didion, has noted, derives in part from the too-ready accessibility of his references. 'When it comes to relationships,' Isaac tells Yale, 'I'm the winner of the August Strindberg Award.' (The meaning is clear, even if one has never read a line of Strindberg.) Allen's humour, it is true, remains self-referential and hermetic, and in the past it tended to work on the saturation, hit-or-miss principle; in *Manhattan*, however, comic misjudgments have all but been eliminated. The film shines with lines which sound like, but probably aren't, exhilarating ad-libbed rejoinders.

Filmed in Panavision on Technicolor stock which was then printed in black and white, *Manhattan* is decisively unified by the controlling influence of Gordon Willis' luminous camera-work. The film is intricately patterned with street dolly shots, high angles and static medium shots. While from time to time framing long shots, such as that which catches Mary and Isaac seated at night beside a glimmering 59th Street Bridge, set an almost magical seal on the proceedings. In





'Alien': the astronauts approach the entrance of the derelict ship

*Interiors*, Willis created a curious feeling of stasis; in *Manhattan*, he manages in one memorable scene by pulling back the camera and framing the screen in black—the scene in which Tracy and Isaac sit in his apartment and then ascend a spiral staircase joking about Veronica Lake and Rita Hayworth—to conjure a moment of stasis and harmony. Allen has always had difficulty harmonising his comic talents and the skittering form of his films: *Manhattan* is a temporary resolution gratefully received.

JOHN PYM

## Eagle's Wing

In one of the more maliciously metaphorical sequences of images in Anthony Harvey's *Eagle's Wing* (Rank), a white girl being dragged along at the end of a rope by her Kiowa captor suddenly stumbles to her knees, faced by a scorpion with its tail raised to sting. Grinning, the Indian promptly jams an altar crucifix—booty, along with the girl, from a stagecoach attack—down on the scorpion so that it is trapped within the hollow base. Later, picking up the crucifix found mysteriously ornamenting the desert, a member of the pursuing posse is stung by the scorpion still clinging to it. The appurtenances of religion may mean salvation, but they also bring death.

'Long before the myths began, it was primitive, unforgiving...' Martin Sheen's offscreen voice ponderously intones after an opening shot panning slowly in a circle round a desert moonscape in which one would hardly be surprised to see the apes of 2001 flinging their bone to the skies. Imposed on the film without Harvey's approval, this prefatory legend suggests a primordial conflict in a West which has yet to be tamed; but although for a time the law of the jungle seems indeed to be the rule, what the film is really after is the way those myths took shape and gradually hardened into fact.

Next, in an image of splendid majesty looming out of the dust that swirls across the plain in the half-light of dawn, a Comanche chief rides proudly by on a magnificent white stallion, armed with spear, shield and war-bonnet, and accompanied by two braves with a travois loaded with pelts. The king of the jungle, eyed with envy by lesser beasts, he is ambushed by a band of Kiowas after his pelts, one of whom (Sam Waterston) also covets his horse, the Eagle's Wing which can outdistance any other mount in the territory.

Soon after, white civilisation in two very distinct guises enters the lists alongside the Comanche

knight so unchivalrously defeated. In a parodic display of awareness of danger from the savage natives of the West, a fur-trader (Harvey Keitel), clearly all too urban but coming on like a Daniel Boone Indian-fighter as he picks his way towards a meeting with the Comanche, is killed by the Kiowas for his horses and supplies; after which his even more inexperienced partner (Martin Sheen) sets out on the vengeance trail. And in an equally parodic display of indifference to the dangers, the passengers on a stagecoach blithely wine and dine until attacked by the Kiowas, whereupon a posse is sent out after the girl (Caroline Langrishe) taken by Waterston as his captive.

What ensues is basically a fascinating duel between Sheen and Waterston, each of whom covets the Comanche's white stallion, each being a failure in his own world who sees the phenomenal horse as a source of personal glory, and each growing increasingly indifferent to anything else—wealth, women, even life itself—as he pursues his dream. One would hesitate to describe the elusive white horse they pursue so single-mindedly—and which Waterston finally wins, only to find himself back in the same landscape as at the beginning, on a circular track which will surely end with the horse escaping him again—as a holy grail, except that the references are so specific in the film. Not only the knightly appearance of the Comanche at the beginning, but the mounting chivalry of the combat between Waterston and Sheen, ending with a formal tournament, staged in striking echo of a medieval joust, with the damsel standing by to bestow her favours on whoever proves to be her champion.

Conducted with almost religious fervour by Sheen and Waterston, this quest is the centrepiece of what is tantamount to a holy war. Expanding in concentric circles, from the initial attack on the Comanche chief, is a series of parallel pursuits and fanaticisms. Waterston, having lost the horse when the dying Comanche managed to ride away on it, steals it back after Sheen stumbles on the Comanche burial ground, accidentally kills the shaman in performance of ritual sacrifices, and makes off with the horse. So, unknown to Sheen, just as Waterston is unaware of the posse sent to retrieve the captive white girl, two Comanches are in pursuit to avenge his act of desecration.

With the aid of superb camerawork by Billy Williams, Harvey tells his tale in glorious images, sometimes traditionally Western, occasionally Gothic, often elegantly witty. The Fordian scene of the posse assembling at the hacienda, for instance, with a pretty girl clutching a rose as she watches her lover ride out; the stagecoach making its stately

way across the plain preceded by a hearse drawn by four plumed black horses (on one of which a lone rider later gallops through the night with black cloak billowing in unnerving imitation of the Headless Horseman); the bereaved widow (Stéphane Audran), sitting placidly under an umbrella by the looted stagecoach as the posse rides into sight, daintily retrieving from the dead man's pocket a spotless handkerchief with which to simulate a genteel tear.

But what is fascinating about the film is the way characters, images and incidents all combine to indicate the inevitable growth of the myth whereby the white man always spoke with forked tongue and the vicious red varmints had to be ruthlessly exterminated. Extracting the kernel from Harvey Keitel's elaborate display of frontiersmanship, Sheen thereafter has one credo: 'Those heathen bastards!' The priest on the stagecoach (John Castle), whose sister is dragged away, is concerned only for the safety of his chalices and churchly symbols. Following their own crusade, the two Comanches are ruthlessly gunned down by one of the two surviving posse members, clearly in the belief that the only good Indian is a dead one, while his companion, superstitiously dissociating himself from the act by making the sign of the cross, does not demur. And finally there is Caroline Langrishe, the well-trained Catholic girl whose prayers to the Virgin Mary for deliverance from her savage captor are rewarded by an incipient love for him.

Incipient is the operative word here, since she recants as soon as a white man hoves in view; and what the film demonstrates is that a possible relationship between white and red becomes impossible as soon as civilisation intrudes with its prejudices and its acquisitory hunger for gold as well as souls. Since virtually no dialogue is spoken in the film after the first few minutes, objects take on an unusual significance; and in an extraordinary sequence which resumes the argument of the film, Waterston garlands a forest with all the symbols of desire. Discarding vestments, chalices, gold coins, jewels, and finally the captive girl herself, he is of course attempting to delay pursuit. But he is also casting aside all the unnecessary ballast of spiritual and material acquisition that has been introduced into the world, until he is finally alone with the horse, a distant speck in the endless plain, revelling in the majesty of total, untrammelled freedom.

TOM MILNE

## Alien

If there is a distinguishing feature of British science fiction films, it would have to be (although the description is all too glib) their insularity. Whereas the American cinema tackles the monstrous and the unknown with a certain brash contempt, undoubtedly the result of a national ability to turn any kind of immigrant into an average American, the British consistently treats its visitors with an uneasy reserve. Since the time of Wells and the other *fin de siècle* journalists, our fear of invasion has had more than geographical implications—we have not yet lost enough arrogance to tolerate becoming part of someone else's Empire. The Quatermass films, and the extraordinary grip that the initial television series achieved, demonstrate this with striking clarity; they evoked horror simply by the threat of absorption into a different kind of existence.

In Ridley Scott's *Alien* (Fox), the Quatermass syndrome continues. For all that its producers, writers and cast are predominantly American, this gorgeous, leisurely horror film expresses a spectacularly British xenophobia, a parenthetical nightmare of invasion envisioned between an awakening (at the start of the film) and a return to sleep (at its close). Had Scott started and ended the story on the same face, his metaphor might have been too emphatic: the waking dream of a girl, any girl, whose authority, integrity, identity are due to be challenged. As it is, the implications are wider, more national, one way of life versus another, a parable which, like *The Deer Hunter*, asks whether



we go out and adapt or stay home and stagnate, and which, like *Invasion or Village of the Damned*, concludes that we are better off with the strictest quarantine regulations in the world.

If the film has something new to offer, then, it is certainly not its theme, which echoes affectionately with misquotes from a clutch of fantasy classics, most noticeably from *The Thing* and *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and most unavoidably from *Star Wars* and *Dark Star*. One speech about the alien brings instant recall of the scientist's tray of blood-sucking shrublets in the Hawks film (with perhaps a hint of Siegel's bodysnatchers): 'I admire its purity—it has no conscience, no remorse, no morality.' In fact the alien's requirements are modestly conventional: to survive long enough to procreate, just like any other tourist. That it needs to plant its offspring in living containers is the merest mischance, particularly for the living containers.

Although there are not yet enough Ridley Scott films for us to be more than tentative about his underlying concerns, it's intriguing that both *Alien* and *The Duellists* deal with forms of symbiosis. The two obsessive swordsmen, hacking at each other while the Napoleonic Wars roll by, occupy a similar extra-temporal plane to that of the starship *Nostromo* and its crew. The direction of their lives is dictated partly by the military code to which they are sworn (finding its counterpart in the all-powerful 'Company' that owns the *Nostromo* and its crew under binding contract), and partly by the fascination of their otherwise purposeless feud. In *Alien*, the small group of specialists existing inertly in sleep-pods is forced to come to life and to keep fighting until the battle is resolved; for them too, the duel gives meaning to their journey. And Scott makes additional reference to co-existence in his use of the ship's cat, the other alien, whose wanderings on the *Nostromo* are carefully linked with those of the more lethal visitor. The cat, not the alien, gets netted early in the hunt, while Scott cuts to the cat's face as a victim is noisily claimed, as though the whole event were part of a feline master plan. And indeed it's the cat that gets the girl when the time comes again for deep sleep. We're left with the reminder that aliens already share our world, and that some have longer claws than others.

The weakness of *Alien*—and Scott has done his best to conceal it—is that there is not much variety in a narrative constructed around a monster-hunt. Once identified, the thing has to be pursued through identical sequences of mounting suspense until the climactic instant when it taps the next victim on the shoulder. Apart from one very clumsy such encounter, when the thing all but says 'boo', the film dutifully deals out the shocks, although with increasing desperation—great bursts of Dolby stereo at first, and shrieking strobe flashes at the end, as if our astronaut were looking for Mr Goodbar. But two main factors take it distinctively out of the ordinary as a horror show, the first being the uniquely revolting scene of John Hurt's dinner-table death as the creature lifts from the bloody swamp of his chest, and the second being the changing appearance of the alien itself. First seen as a prehensile kind of shrimp, expiring into a rather damp mixed grill, it is quickly transformed to a living Giger sculpture of organic steel, unfortunately never pausing long enough to be admired in its full beauty.

And beauty, ultimately, is what *Alien* brings to science fiction cinema, from its first contemplative prow around the superb corridors of the *Nostromo* to the quite magnificent sequence of the planetary exploration, the entry of the alien spaceship through vaguely obscene orifices, and the revelation of the vast, chilling desolation inside. The film has been designed and shot with such glowing care that the astronauts, unlike their rumpled counterparts in *Dark Star*, are more objects than people, parts of a general design of colour and texture, models to support the magnificent encrusted spacesuits designed by John Mollo. Impractical they may be (the faceplates are constantly steaming up), but as they stumble across the hideous

landscape these armoured shapes have a vulnerability that contrives to be more appealing than the people inside them, providing an unexpected and subtle link with the antagonist they are going to meet. With the sole exception of *2001*, where the hardware was all clean, antiseptic lines and lights, *Alien* outshines all competition in the luminous splendour of its photography, and what it lacks in substance it more than gains in the elegant pattern of its images. Despite the shocks, the gore, and the amiable performances (of which Veronica Cartwright's is the most thankless, Ian Holm's the most intriguing), *Alien* evades what was mundane in *Star Wars* and obscure in *Close Encounters* and reminds us once more that science fiction is the story of inner space.

PHILIP STRICK

## Woyzeck

Consistent in nothing if not his eccentricity, Werner Herzog has only in his two most recent features (his eighth and ninth) bothered to do what most young film-makers do in their first: to come to terms with the past, sort out where they stand in relation to other movies. Herzog has perhaps been assumed (not least by Herzog himself) to be such an original that he doesn't need to be referred to any tradition. And it may be perverse proof of that to find both *Nosferatu* and *Woyzeck* awkwardly digesting their given material, and Herzog with more determination than conviction adapting himself to alien dramatic traditions (in what might be seen as an attempt, ironically, to find himself a specifically Germanic home). Whether or not, by switching to adaptations, Herzog has exhausted his 'originality' is another question, but it was probably only a matter of time before this dauntless conquistador should run out of new territories to explore, new landscapes in which to set man (the ridiculous) before nature (the sublime). Herzog, arguably, was already heading up a dead end with *Stroszek*, in which the child of nature suffers the familiar indignities of the road movie hero. The two new films have at least restored the cosmic level to his irony, which never bothered to suggest that such inspired fools as Aguirre, Woodcarver Steiner or Kaspar Hauser should be pitied for their social maladjustment.

That the old Herzog is alive and well might be assumed from the provisional way he has treated his pre-existing texts. It hardly seems relevant to consider whether the films are successful adapta-

tions—the texts are simply man-made landscapes which Herzog rifles for his favourite man-made contradictions: between social roles and transcendental aspirations; between life's 'little' deaths and a profounder death-wish that amounts to life everlasting; between prescribed circles and some limitless trajectory. Herzog's implicit assertion here that he belongs to certain traditions (Murnau and expressionism; Büchner and the first tragedy of common man) might be construed as an attempt to run for cover—rather in the way his short film *La Soufrière*, having failed to show nature cataclysmically cancelling man, makes do with comments on the social disgrace of the people who live on the side of a volcano. But far from becoming 'home' to him, the texts seem to be locations as exotic as the Amazon jungle or the African desert, substitutes for a new physical direction; and if not entirely satisfactory as such, they do allow some room for manoeuvre.

One can assume that Herzog is respectful of Murnau because his *Nosferatu* literally duplicates so many images from the original. That he wants—or is able—to remake Murnau's classic is doubtful, because his own identification with the extraordinary, the supernatural, keeps running counter to the story's insistence on the tragedy of a being who can never die, therefore never love, never live in the present. What Herzog does is to make his own contrary film inside the original, elevating Jonathan Harker from functionary to dual protagonist, so that at the very moment Dracula is released from eternal life by lingering with Lucy beyond first cock-crow, Jonathan is released from the bourgeois present (the canals of Wismar, ever circling on themselves) to become the new emissary of the undead.

A less schizophrenic work, *Woyzeck* (Contemporary) is in many ways a faithful adaptation of George Büchner's strange fragmentary play, written shortly before his death in 1836 at the age of twenty-three and unperformed for nearly a century afterwards. Herzog has deleted and compressed some material but invented nothing, and one might assume that he found Büchner's terse, gnomic dialogue, his non-linear construction and his yoking of a cosmic and a social sense of injustice adaptable enough to his own declamatory, disjunctive style. There is also a characteristic Herzog tension in Büchner: the contradiction between his 'new' naturalism (a proletarian hero, first driven crazy and then to murder by an unjust society) and his 'new' expressionism (the brief, elliptical scenes) that made the play unperformable for so long.

'Woyzeck': Klaus Kinski, Willy Semmelrogge





Herzog even draws imagery from Büchner that is strongly reminiscent of previous Herzog. The fair which the soldier Woyzeck (Klaus Kinski) attends with his common-law wife Marie (Eva Mattes) features a demonstration of the 'human' understanding of animals and the low evolutionary standing of some humans (i.e. soldiers) that recalls the exhibition of freaks in *Kaspar Hauser*. Büchner's archetypes of the bourgeois order, the Doctor and the Captain, who prod experimentally at Woyzeck, and push him towards his final madness by teasing him about Marie's infidelity with the Drum Major, are also dotty rationalists in the Herzog tradition. The stream beside which Woyzeck kills Marie, and in which he tries to wash away his sin, is conjured at the very beginning of the film as an idyllic setting for the placid, strangely toy-like garrison town (Herzog's treatment of man and nature taking him by a more direct route than the conventions of expressionism back to Murnau). *Woyzeck's* most severe limitation, in fact, might not be its given literary qualities but the extent to which it has allowed Herzog to remake something like *Kaspar Hauser*. Woyzeck is explained here even less than he is in the original: he is an obscurely obsessed mooncalf, tortured by cosmic visions as much as he is victimised by military discipline and the economic need that drives him to take part in the Doctor's experiments. Büchner's references to silence, darkness, blindness, and his apocalyptic biblical parables, are also typical of Herzog, but remain tensely contained in the text, unreleased in the imagery.

It is in this respect that one again finds Herzog slipping into two minds about his source. If he has changed little in Büchner, he has significantly reordered the opening scenes, so that one is forced to accept Woyzeck as a visionary, a man whose delirium is somehow more creditable than the functional buffoonery of those around him, before any psychological and/or social causes can be considered. Woyzeck's first scene with the Captain, for instance, in which he carries out his duties as barber in such a fit of agitation that the officer begs him to slow down, is presented some time before—instead of immediately after—the scene in which he discovers the ear-rings which the Drum Major has given to Marie. His manic haste thus seems an inexplicable state of soul, or a reaction to the manifest absurdity of his life, rather than the shock of discovering himself a cuckold.

For all the jagged construction of his play, Büchner uses the character's growing sense of betrayal as his prime motive for murder. Herzog

leaves it unclear as to how much Woyzeck knows or guesses about the adultery, so that one is left again with a protagonist carried away by mystical forces, with a social context (as in *La Soufrière*) adduced as an afterthought. Mainly by casting Kinski as a fiercely frenetic Woyzeck—rather than the dolefully accusatory character one would expect if he had followed his original intention of using Bruno S.—Herzog avoids the indulgence of simply remaking *Kaspar Hauser*. He has, more successfully than in *Nosferatu*, accommodated his own personality to the original author; and if it is less than exploratory, the film works finally as a canny holding measure.

RICHARD COMBS

## Man of Marble

The most succinct way to describe *Man of Marble* (Connoisseur) is as an East European *Citizen Kane*. Thematically, Andrzej Wajda's film is concerned with the mechanics of mythology: it explores the apparatus whereby a public image is created, modified and demolished, while simultaneously pursuing its own investigation into the reality behind the official myths. Like *Kane*, it is concerned with the power of the media to manipulate and even to manufacture truth; but where Welles was conducting a many-levelled enquiry into the power of the press, the medium with which Wajda is centrally concerned is that of the motion picture. His film, even more than *Kane*, becomes a technical demonstration of his subject matter: its virtuoso style has a total thematic relevance. And, as with Welles, the political sensitivity of Wajda's theme has scarcely helped ingratiate him with those who control domestic film production.

Where *Kane* himself was an American archetype, essentially a self-made man and myth, Wajda's hero is, as befits a socialist society, a pure product of the state. His Mateusz Birkut (Jerzy Radziwiłłowicz) became a national hero during Poland's post-war reconstruction, earning his status as a Stakhanovite when, during the building of the industrial show town of Nova Huta, he led his four-man team in laying a record 30,000 bricks in a single shift. Immortalised in marble and on canvas, he became a union delegate but fell from favour in 1952, when condemned to prison after publicly defending the fellow-worker, Witek, accused of sabotage following the accident in which Birkut's hands were irreparably burned. Released

in 1956, the apparently rehabilitated Birkut had made a single (filmed) public appearance to plead for national unity in the 1957 elections before disappearing from sight.

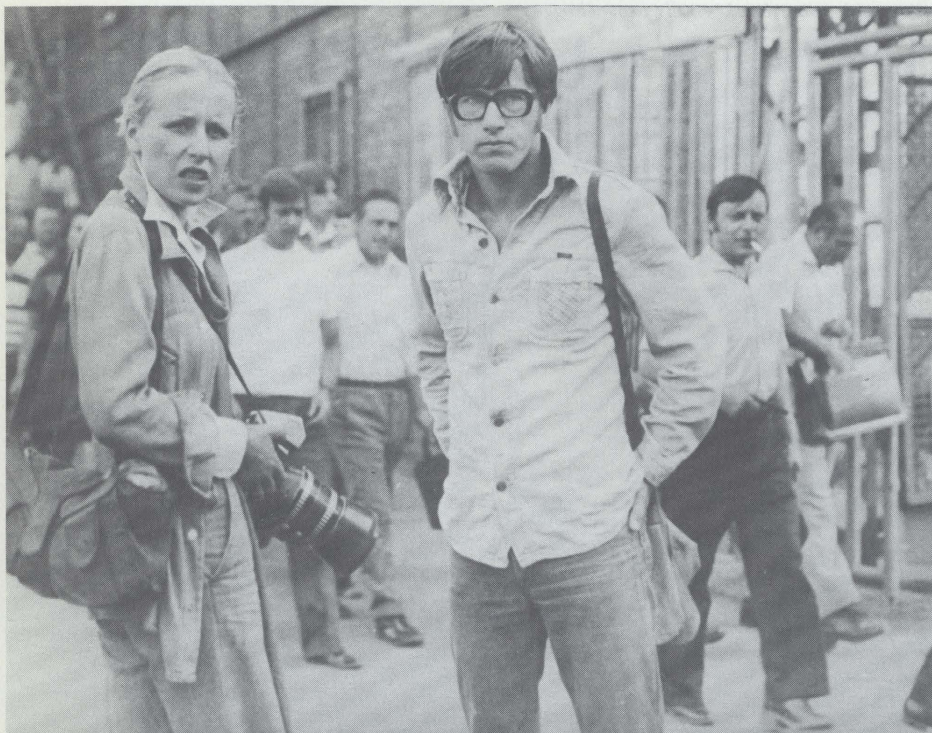
Some twenty years later, his fate arouses the insatiable curiosity of an ambitious young filmmaker, Agnieszka (Krystyna Janda), first seen bullying a television executive into producing her diploma film on the subject of 'Falling Stars'. Agnieszka is a determinedly contemporary figure, striding at a more than manly pace in her blue denim suit, gracefully abusing the male crew assigned to her, touting her worldly possessions around in a giant kit-bag. Her knowledge of the past appears as perfunctory as her knowledge of careerist politics (the TV producer's) or *realpolitik*; yet it is precisely this incautious ignorance (a survival of the spirit of '68?) which enables her to bludgeon her way through to the other truth she is seeking. Initially camouflaged by her surface of Westernised sophistication, her basic ingenuousness will prove to be a quality which she and her elusive subject have in common.

Agnieszka's researches, and our own introduction to Birkut, begin in the projection room, where a sympathetic cutter and survivor of political shifts ('I'm not paid to think, only to splice film') has assembled for her the footage of Birkut left in the archives—all of it in black and white. Some suppressed and silent scenes from *Birth of a City*, in which Birkut leads his fellow-workers in a *Potemkin*-style mutiny over inadequate food, appear in marked contrast to the patriotic montage and militant optimism of the 'official' Birkut film, *Architects of our Happiness* (on whose credits the name of A. Wajda appears as assistant director), although both prove to have had the same director, Jerzy Burski. A visit to Burski, now a festival jet-setter, provokes his own revelations about the background of *Architects*. As he cynically takes full credit for master-minding and directing Birkut's bricklaying feat to advance his own career ('I wanted a different Stakhanovite, but the best ones had all been used up'), his recollections—including the retakes of Birkut's patriotic triumph—take form on the screen. The only indication that they are flashbacks is that, although in colour like the film's 'present tense', they are all shot with a fixed tripod camera. They thus provide a sharp visual contrast to the restless hand-held camera with which Wajda follows the peripatetic Agnieszka, and over which Agnieszka herself has many an argument with her elderly cameraman (who, it transpires, was part of Burski's original crew).

Any implication that Wajda, by endorsing the stylistic preferences of his aggressive heroine ('Hand-held shots. Wide-angle lens. You've seen the latest American films, haven't you?'), is also suggesting that there's more truth and less manipulation with a mobile camera is neatly scotched within the film itself. The wide-angle shots of Burski's jet taxi-ing in to land are, as well as a political comment on the Americanisation of one of the film's more flagrant opportunists, also a timely demonstration of the ease with which the camera can inflate the significance of neutral events. There is an echo here of an early scene in which Agnieszka snatches the camera herself and, filming illegally in the museum vault for banished monuments, sits astride the fallen colossus of her missing hero. While Wajda's camera is ironically pointing out the sculptor's power to distort through magnification, Agnieszka's is busy reproducing these distortions through the latest fashionable means.

In emphasising that the *ars longa* maxim is particularly inapplicable to 'official' art, Wajda is, of course, also commenting on the ephemeral nature of political truths. His film explores the inextricable relationship between styles and politics, not merely through its own aesthetic but also through its treatment of time in relation to individuals. Many of his characters are juxtaposed with images of themselves twenty years before. The disgraced Witek is now a steel plant technocrat (whose works' helicopter justifies a stunning aerial shot); the party spy from the 50s is rediscovered recruiting girls for nationalised striptease; the gymnast heroine whom Birkut married is revealed

'Man of Marble': Krystyna Janda as the enquiring film-maker





drinking herself to death (like the second Mrs Kane) in black market luxury. Only the dead (Birkut, as it transpires) or the very young (Agnieszka) appear immune from the opportunism that advances with age and blurs the clear lines of early character.

Despite this, the final sequence of Agnieszka and Birkut's son marching along the TV corridors to liberate the newly suppressed truth marks *Man of Marble* as an ultimately optimistic film. In this respect, it is in marked contrast to the second part of Wajda's proposed triptych, *Without Anaesthetic*, in which a purged professor and cult journalist slips from complacency to suicide in present-day Poland, while his students follow his advice and abstain from making a fuss.

JAN DAWSON

## Pretty Baby

Of course Louis Malle cheats a little in the studies of adolescence that have preoccupied him recently, allowing—for instance—no shadow of submerged guilt to cloud the wholly therapeutic incest that ends *Le Souffle au Coeur*. But after all, why not, since he is dealing with special cases, with children intransigent enough or lucky enough not to have been infected by social taboos? Sin, as these *enfants sauvages* demonstrate, exists largely in the carefully civilised mind of the beholder.

The first half of *Pretty Baby* (CIC) is pure magic: a New Orleans bordello seen through the eyes of a child who was born in it, who has absorbed all its secrets, and whose virginity will be sold by auction when she reaches her twelfth birthday. Meantime, she sees it as a strange wonderland in which something new is always going on, something to add a fascinating touch of imagination to her games. The year is 1917 and the house, evidently inaugurated at the height of the rococo 1880s, has run rather to seed just prior to its final closure by the militant forces of chastity and temperance. With the shine long rubbed from its gilt and crimson plush, it looks less like the traditional bawdy-house of movie myth than a stately (if not entirely respectable) Edwardian family mansion. Upstairs, after the babies and smaller children are packed off to the nursery, the girls entertain their clients in maids' bedrooms equipped with severe iron bedsteads. Downstairs, as the champagne flows and the coloured pianist launches into his Jelly Roll Morton repertoire, an endless series of glittering uncles and aunts pause for a benign word with the wide-eyed child.

In this atmosphere, Violet (Brooke Shields) grows up in innocence and candour. For all the enchantment—a voodoo woman casting fortune-telling spells, whores sprawled like Degas dancers in weary *déshabille*, the irresistible gaiety of the jazz and ragtime soundtrack—Malle makes no attempt to soften his picture. Corruption exists, and the future that awaits Violet is alarmingly encapsulated in the wizened old madam (a marvellous performance by the jazz singer Frances Faye) whose *levée* she attends: four-poster curtains parting to reveal a clown's grotesquely painted face while a claw reaches for the lifesaving glass of absinthe, and later the sniff of cocaine which means that a new day can once again be faced.

Yet not for nothing does Malle open the film on a deliberately ambivalent note, with a sustained close-up of Violet staring at an off-screen scene accompanied by orgasmic cries which are eventually revealed to be the sufferings of her mother (Susan Sarandon) in labour. As we uneasily follow Violet through her days at the bordello, watching as she acquires the methods and mannerisms of the trade, gradually ripening until the interest of a client is roused, it all remains a game to her, even the ultimate humiliation of the ceremony in which she is paraded and sold at a slave auction (an analogy stressed with beautiful understatement as Malle cuts from face to watching face until, reaching the piano-player, he fixes impassively on the impassive black face).



'Pretty Baby': *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, New Orleans style

Then comes a twin theatrical coup engineered by Malle and by Violet. Cutting from Violet's brutish purchaser undoing his braces as he advances on her to a shot of the other girls rushing anxiously in after the event to see how she has fared, Malle shows her lying inert, face down on the bed. Consternation and panic. But a cheerfully giggling Violet leaps to her feet, delighted with the success of her little joke. The ugliness of her experience has simply passed her by, literally sliding off like water from a duck's back; and for some time afterwards, miming the skills of a whore for the pleasure of various gratified customers, she remains the child playing at dressing up. Contrariwise, her first horrified peek into the adult world arises from a childish prank when she and a small friend dare an even smaller coloured boy to prove his boast that he has enjoyed 'it' many times. Reacting with a violence inexplicable to the children, later backed by a sound whipping, the coloured boy's mammy offers explanation from the adult world: 'White and coloured can't be together as far as that is concerned...'

Casualty, of course, since a coloured girl is on display among the whores, although no coloured man is permitted as a client; and the litter of evasions, equivocations and special pleadings lining the dark path between the moralist and what he defines as immoral is repeatedly illuminated throughout the film. On a fairly obvious level, when Violet's mother yearns to escape the brothel through married respectability, and another girl snaps, 'It's those respectable people that lie on top of you every night.' More subterraneously, when a professional photographer (Keith Carradine) arrives with a mission to execute a series of whorehouse studies. His first subject is Violet's mother, weary, sweaty and dishevelled after a night on the job. Mysteriously, his photograph excises the dirt and degradation, and she emerges with all the earthy freshness and charm, all the innocence in a word, of one of Auguste Renoir's nudes.

The camera may perhaps lie, but at least it has no moral preconceptions; and this precisely defines Carradine's role in the film as an observer who is gradually involved. Becoming an *habitué* of the house because of his obsessive desire to record its beauties, but showing no desire to avail himself of its wares, he is adopted as a pet by the girls under the affectionate nickname of 'Poppa', which covers

a multitude of speculations as to the nature of his particular hang-up. All too easy to see him as another Humbert Humbert; yet the film makes it quite clear that he has no interest in Violet, that it is she who is pursuing him with an adolescent crush, until the moment when she runs away from the brothel after her whipping and seeks refuge in his home.

Then, in a sentimental education beautifully played by both Carradine and Brooke Shields, as he chides her furiously for aping adulthood and equally furiously for reverting to childishness, she achieves the first glimmerings of maturity and he falls in love with the childish innocence she has preserved. At which point, morality intervenes in the person of her mother, now married and come to claim her daughter for school and respectability.

In one of two scenes slightly tampered with by the censor (the other is the one in which Carradine photographs Violet as the Naked Majia; originally he, she and the camera were seen in one now censored shot), Violet is torn between her mother and her lover. The decisive factor for the child is her mother's arms; for the budding adult (unmistakably in the complete print), the appealing brawn of her new father. And as she is caught by the latter's Box Brownie, frozen in the same mute incomprehension as the Antoine Doinel of *Les quatre cents coups*, one knows infallibly that she is heading away from innocence and towards an educated appreciation of the 'degradation' she has suffered.

TOM MILNE

## Hair

On the stage, *Hair* was first and foremost a spectacle, blatant or exhilarating according to taste, but imposing itself essentially in the manner of a commercial for a somewhat glamorised version of hippy sub-culture and deploying only an irreducible minimum of narrative. In adapting the show—some dozen years on—for the cinema, Milos Forman and his scenarist Michael Weller have considerably expanded the token plot elements of the original. The protagonist of the screen *Hair* (United Artists) becomes Oklahoma farm boy Claude (John Savage), in New York to be



conscripted for military service, who is befriended by a quartet of hippies led by Berger (Treat Williams). They in turn engineer for him a romance with society girl Sheila (Beverly D'Angelo). The latter part of the movie shifts the action to the Nevada military base to which Claude is posted, and from where Berger, after a factitious mix-up, reluctantly emplanes for Vietnam in his stead.

The manner of the first sequences arouses expectations of a bold and successful opening-up. The film begins with an arrestingly silent evocation (somehow reminiscent of the dawn scenes of *Taking Off*) of Claude's farewell to his father as he boards the bus for New York. A startling transition shifts the locale to Central Park, where in a whirl of camera movement and Twyla Tharp choreography Berger and the rest are observed at their 'be-in', prior to their becoming acquainted first with Claude, whom they solicit for small change, and then with Sheila, whose horse they ask to ride.

The promise of these passages derives partly from their formal embodiment of the lure of the counter-culture, in the juxtaposition of the sober realism in terms of which Claude is introduced and the elaborately artificial design which characterises the hippies' introduction. But they gain a further density from their use of a linking imagery of horses (the farm animals of the Oklahoma scenes; the sleek creatures ridden by Sheila and her mother) which—through such further devices as the winning conceit of having the police horses which appear at the be-in dancing circus-style to the music—serves to synthesise the movie's musical and non-musical components in witty and appealing fashion.

Sadly, this promise rapidly peters out, and subsequently the disparate elements jostle together with increasing discomfort. Although the score has been somewhat thinned out, a good many songs remain—some of them tending to sound, at least to a non-aficionado's ear, fairly interchangeable—and several make their appearance in a quasi-naturalistic context to notably arbitrary and unlikely effect. An exception, certainly, is 'Good Morning Starshine', perhaps musically the best number, which is placed with unaffected appropriateness during the cross-country drive to Nevada and unflashily utilises aerial shots to create a real sense of brio. Against this, however, must be set, say, the plain incoherence of the title number, involving much frenzied leaping about in the jail

where Claude and his new-found cronies temporarily find themselves.

The sequence that precedes this, when the hippies gate-crash Sheila's birthday party, succinctly throws into relief the clash of interests between Forman's social comedy and the demands of a musical. The episode begins with some characteristically sly and accurate, if hardly adventurous, observations of the low-profile attempts of Sheila's father and brother to deal with the intruders. But its pay-off in Berger's exhibitionist dance number atop the banquetting table depends upon a response—or lack of it—from the invited guests that is quite out of keeping with even halfway realistic social satire. Forman, in fact, seems most confident with the Nevada sequences, which abandon music to concentrate on the energetic comic set-piece of stealing a uniform for Berger and then on the blacker farcical nightmare of his realisation that he is taking Claude's place more completely than he had bargained for. It is a particularly unhappy miscalculation, though, that the latter passage should conclude with Berger giving voice, as he is marched into the transport plane, to a reprise chorus of the whimsical 'Manchester, England, England', a gesture redolent less of the impending realities of Vietnam than of Nelson Eddy leading his men off to war in some Sigmund Romberg operetta.

It is true that, during the military training sequences, Forman intercuts a parade being harangued with patriotic platitudes by a hard-bitten general (a gritty farewell cameo by Nicholas Ray) with scenes at a hippy anti-war rally, a device cued by having a recording of the music from the rally somehow fed into the camp public address system. Through this crude effect, and the more subtle one of the reaction shot of the general's grim satisfaction as riflemen shoot out the offending loudspeakers, the movie does take on—however simplistically—some political frame of reference. Yet its treatment of the hippies themselves remains basically evasive. The only challenge to their unflinchingly picturesque self-confidence comes from a discarded fiancée (in the song 'Easy to be Hard'), and the temporary impasse this creates is resolved merely by her co-option into the merry band. Berger may have been seen earlier scrounging money from his seemingly none too well-off parents, but the implications of this—from either point of view—are shuffled aside amid a feeble

display of domestic sitcom. Indeed, it seems somehow revealing that the lengthy LSD trip sequence in the middle of the film should deal so much in the imagery of consumer luxury; or that the number 'Black Boys/White Boys'—in sheerly cinematic terms the movie's most inventive interlude—should be staged around the military induction proceedings in such a way as to implicate the conscripting officers in the general fund of inter-racial harmony and sexual goodwill.

The coda to *Hair* shows a triumphal hippy gathering. Finally the image freezes and turns to sepia: an apt enough device for the commemoration of a vanished past. But one wishes that the preceding two hours, for all their intermittent surface pleasures, could have provided a focused evaluation of their subject. As it is, Arthur Penn's *Alice's Restaurant*—a film whose situations and even imagery *Hair* several times calls to mind—offers from its contemporary vantage-point a far more reflective impression of late-60s counter-culture than Forman can come up with a decade later.

TIM PULLEINE

## Old Boyfriends

Along with its heroine Diane (travelling under her maiden name of Cruise and played by Talia Shire), the first feature as director from *Nashville* screenwriter Joan Tewkesbury goes off the rails about halfway through. Although it gets back on the track for its final sequences, one is but uneasily convinced that the point at which Diane and it eventually arrive is anywhere close to their original destination. Since *Old Boyfriends* (Artificial Eye) is something of a road movie (and one of the very few, apart from *The Rain People* by Talia Shire's brother, to place a woman in the driver's seat), our enjoyment of its weird, witty and suspenseful travelling is no doubt more to the filmic point than any lingering reservations about its arrival. Yet the reservations persist; and probably one's retrospective sense of having participated in a schizophrenic experience has less to do with the gradual revelation of the heroine's imbalanced state than with a perception of her as caught in the middle of a tug-of-war between the film's script and its direction. It's a conflict of which the director herself must be aware: certainly it is underlined by David Shire's music score, which alternates some tense *Psycho*-style chords with melodic passages of soft-focus romanticism.

After a pair of psychological clues—a tense credits sequence, in which an aerial shot observes a white car weaving its way through the freeway traffic and hurtling over a stencilled road sign, 'Ends', before bouncing sideways off a concrete wall at the end of the asphalt; and a quick sequence in which a tape of 'You Belong to Me' is anonymously played to a puzzled couple on the end of the telephone—the film's 'explanations' begin, and with them its seemingly linear trajectory. As she heads in her blue Thunderbird up the foggy mountain road towards Colorado, Diane's voice-over narration informs us that, after reading through her old diaries, she has decided to revisit her old boyfriends, hoping that renewed contact with a lovable past self may enable her to discover a more comfortable present identity. She sticks to her itinerary: after reviving all the matrimonial hopes of her college boyfriend Jeff (Richard Jordan), she disappears to Minneapolis, and gets her revenge on the loud-mouthed Eric (John Belushi) who had humiliated her in high school. Then, in the small Milwaukee town where she attended junior high, undeterred by the discovery that her first love, Lewis, has died in Vietnam, she seduces his mentally disturbed brother Wayne (David Carradine) in a miscalculated attempt to recapture a lost innocence. Brutally denounced by his doctor ('Is your present life so insufficient that you have to make love to a dead boy's memory?'), she returns tearfully to her California home, where she's rescued from lovelessness by the persistent Jeff, who has traced her through a detective.

'Hair': Treat Williams and Charlotte Rae cause consternation in the birthday party sequence





What's unsettling to the spectator is that while Diane bears all the outward signs of a contemporary heroine (autonomous working woman setting out alone on existential quest), she defines herself and is in turn defined exclusively through her relationships with men, who have the power to shatter or redeem. Initially, this is camouflaged by her sexual aggressiveness, as well as by the humour of her first two encounters. Jeff is rediscovered shooting a commercial with a dead fish; Eric is still giving off-key renditions of the songs that made him Dr. Cool in 1962 (though to keep up with the times, he's changed the name of his group from 'The Red Eyes' to 'Bloodshot'). It's only with the unhealthy, soft-focus seduction of Wayne—intercut with Jeff's investigative visit to the husband to whom Diane had attributed her own suicide attempt—that we realise Diane to be not in control. From this point, the wit disappears, and the film identifies itself with Jeff's quest to locate the real Diane rather than with her own.

The original version of the Schrader brothers' script, written ten years ago, was entitled *Old Girlfriends* and, with the sexes reversed, reportedly



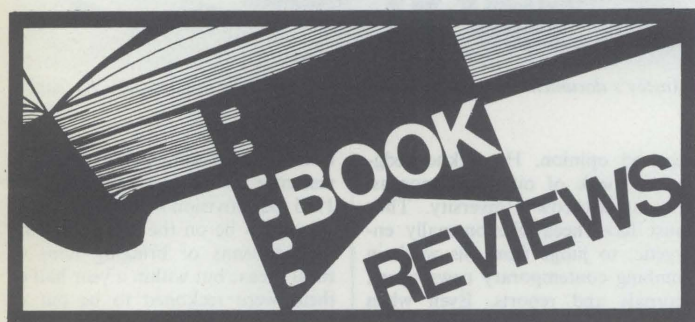
'Old Boyfriends': Talia Shire, Richard Jordan

ended in physical rather than psychological violence. Certainly, it's hard to imagine any modern hero (let alone one by Paul Schrader) agreeing to be defined by a woman's dogged devotion. If, despite its ultimately anti-feminist psychology, *Old Boyfriends* proves a rewarding film, this is less because of the unintegrated wit and

sustained visual elegance of Joan Tewkesbury's direction than because its muddled retrospection masks a lucid and haunting essay on regression.

Diane's own work, as a clinical psychologist, involves her getting her patients to act out their fantasies with toy models. Her journey is a journey back through time—from Jeff (1967) to Eric (1962) to Lewis (1958), in the course of which, like some early Ionesco figure, she is deconstructed in Talia Shire's splendidly neurotic performance. And nearly all the men in her life—Wayne, who has never grown up; Eric, trying to reconcile middle-aged spread with a schoolboy's fantasy; even the husband who has rejected her for a pert child-mistress—have refused to come to terms with adulthood. Perhaps it's fitting that Jeff should be the one to put her back on her feet. The 'happy ending' has an uncomfortable ambivalence. The final shots through Jeff's camera lens, of the diminutive Diane standing beside his own tall daughter, suggest that, despite the eroticism of their relationship, Jeff may in Diane have acquired not a second wife but a second child.

JAN DAWSON



## FILMS OF COMMENT AND PERSUASION OF THE 1930s

### DOCUMENTARY AND EDUCATIONAL FILMS OF THE 1930s

By Rachael Low

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN/BOWKER, each £8.95

Can we first please put the academic strait-jacket back in the cupboard? I feel much too much warmth for Rachael Low and her crazy enterprise to niggle with the inevitable factual inaccuracies in these two new volumes of her astonishing life's work on the History of the British Film. ('Why should you?' says Paul Rotha. 'She gives you one film you never made, all you're missing is the odd credit here and there.') No one else could have assembled so much information—every scrap of which will appear useless to one or another of her readers! No one else could have sensed what revelations might lurk amongst the detritus that she has so miraculously found, examined, recorded and then carefully cast away in her pages so that the generations to come may find their own answers to the true identity of the Thing that Haunted Soho Showbiz (from 1929–1939).

For the want of a better name it was the Non-Fiction Film. Its practitioners could be as solemn as saints, as ludicrous as the bad puns they often made in their commentaries, and on occasion as comforting as a crucifixion. What were they documenting? Of what did they wish to persuade us? Why were they driven to comment? Whither would the

education they offered have led?

Rachael Low—to her and our credit—seems never to entertain the possibility that we assorted manipulators of celluloid and reality were simply waiting for opening time at the Intrepid Fox, the Highlander, the Dog and Duck or the Pillars of Hercules. Nor does she charge any of us—from the makers of medical films to the religious film-makers—with participation in the Wardour Street struggle for commercial power. Indeed she is at her most interesting when she deals with the early history of such good causes as the dedicated promotion of the classroom film, the first phase of the British Film Institute and the emergence of a need and a market for children's entertainment films.

Just why and how the pressure built up for the real world to break through to the screen (well over ten years ahead of its inevitable penetration with television) is left for the reader to decide according to his inclination (and his political prejudice). This hotch-potch of film-making began in fact in modesty and disciplined amity. (Today's occasional squabble about credit due, in those distant and more anonymous days, comes from the enforced idleness of age and not from jealousy.) The films were often made by people—mostly young—who otherwise might have written textbooks, worked in journalism or contented themselves with scholarly papers. They were not unexcited by their new calling (if it were one—which time alone would tell). It was what they had to say that mattered, not the egocentric fact of their

personally saying it. And there was always the hope that a film would take off, out of the world of words, into a life of its own—indescribable even in these eloquent pages.

If the reader feels that Rachael Low—in the manner of the contemporary historian—is a bit patronising to almost everyone, she is, at any rate, dismissive of no one; and if age and sex had only permitted her very welcome access to the bars of Dean Street and Wardour Street at the operative time of her books, she would have found how justified she was. And personal experience would have spared some of the less prominent figures in her story the very occasional unkind word of hearsay. Rachael's informants have sometimes perhaps been over-inclined to emphasise the separation and competition between the various groups. For example, Grierson was on location and *did* contribute (with John Taylor) the slow motion shots for *The Private Life of the Gannets*, which won the first documentary (?) Oscar for Julian Huxley in 1937. I myself was, a year or so earlier, given by Grierson the job of teaching Huxley to use a movie camera (and forgot to tell him how long to hold the button down, so that he returned from Moscow with a well-photographed collection of not very protracted stills). Another example of cross-fertilisation is that I directed and partly photographed *The Norfolk Bittern*, which film turns up in a reference to the naturalist Lord William Percy. This too was arranged by Grierson. We do not seem to be told that Grierson himself was involved in some of the earliest classroom films (from his own E.M.B. Unit with Neill Brown directing) and—pre-E.M.B.—in the production of puppet films with a colourful Italian whose name John Taylor thinks may have been Guido Baldi (though I doubt it).

There was something in the air. The poets would cross Tottenham Court Road from the Bloomsbury pubs (dear, terrifying Nina Hammett); often, too, Lawrence Gilliam, Louis MacNeice, Lance Sieveking and the rest from the BBC radio drama studio (providing an

important pre-Cavalcanti influence on our editing style when sound came to film). And we mixed better than Rachael has been told. Many of the names that turn up here as belonging outside documentary I had always thought of as part of our lot. In fact 'our lot' had little to do with presence on a payroll but with whether you had anything to contribute to the craft (tacitly aspiring always to art) of *communication*. The subject-matter of the communication was secondary providing always that experience was enriched.

Grierson would, and did, talk to anyone who had anything to say and most especially to anyone who practised any skill: boxers, jockeys, footballers, strawberry growers and—if they were eloquent enough—just drunks. And with film-makers not of his special persuasion—once the ritual moral attitude had been struck for the instruction of any of his boys present—he would settle down to match his wits with our guest's special expertise. (Religious film-makers were particularly welcome.) I don't remember us as either social or intellectual snobs; at any rate we were too well brought up by Grierson to be such in company.

The assorted film-makers dealt with by Rachael Low in *Films of Comment and Persuasion* provided in life, and now in her pages, better company when concerned to reveal rather than persuade. Many of those in pursuit of revelation are explorers, and the sections are good that deal with the carrying of cameras to the remoter, higher or colder parts of the planet. But it was the unknown and unexpected found at the end of the street that excited the documentary makers, and it was our disposition to report it rather than immediately draw a moral, which sometimes meant only qualified support for our films from the extreme Left. We felt that facts were better persuaders than arguments. Rachael Low tells us that 'Grierson's basic position was that for democracy to function properly people had to be shown how to use it.' She feels, however, that he did not question the nature of democracy or whether it had in fact arrived. There is criticism of his



failure to involve himself and the movement in the immediate political issues. Yet my own switch to *The March of Time* (where Grierson was consultant) to spend much of 1937-39 on political and anti-fascist films did not happen by chance. Nor did the transfer of Stuart Legg—with his sense of history and his particular geopolitical flair—to Canada to join Grierson at the outbreak of war.

To write, as Rachael Low does, that 'Ivor Montagu differed from Grierson's group in believing that the rise of fascism was to be the vital issue of the time' is to beg the question of what time span Ivor had in mind and to ignore the whole vital difference between the tactical and the strategical aspects of Grierson's perhaps grandiose policy. Whilst agreeing with Rachael that the documentary makers met the tactical requirements of the Spanish Civil War with only a minor and generally private response, I would argue that even in the 30s the Grierson group was unwittingly gaining the expertise to tackle what in fact was to be the vital issue, not of fifteen years but of at least the next half-century.

This crucial issue is still the unequal distribution of wealth between the materially rich and the materially poor, both within national boundaries and across them. Yet redistribution must now occur at the same time that population is increasing and planetary resources failing to sustain even the present rates of Western economic growth. Inner cities are decaying and the unsuitability to his own nature of the environment man is creating for himself is becoming increasingly evident. Clearly documentary films and television programmes have a unique part to play in bringing such issues to life within the imaginations of the ominously competing classes and countries of the world community. With the help of the communications media we can perhaps avoid disaster by encouraging new criteria for the quality of human life, criteria which make fewer demands upon irreplaceable material resources. (Even if it means playing our television commercials backwards!)

Yet I am puzzled to find that it is precisely the type of scientific and industrial documentary that can contribute in this crisis of human ecology that Rachael Low challenges as not being documentary at all. She says of Arthur Elton—whose role derived from a report for Shell written by Grierson in 1933—'he became associated with exquisitely lucid and perfectly photographed technical films which it would stretch the definition of documentary to include.' In heaven's name, what definition? If we take Rachael's own variant on Grierson, 'the creative treatment of reality', I cannot think of a single film from Elton's 'age of reason' whether made today (often by the National Film Board of Canada) or in the 30s when he began, that will not fit comfortably within it. They were more than 'lucid'. They showed how documentary could be used to extend man's power to reason.

To be fair, there is no other evidence that Rachael Low would



A scene from 'Housing Problems', Edgar Anstey's documentary of the 30s and one of the films discussed by Rachael Low

wish fashionably to append a dying fall to the scope or significance of documentary or that she envies earlier romantic titles like *The Rise and Fall of Documentary* or *Journey to a Legend and Back*. The least I can offer in return for the pleasures of these two fine books is a personal demonstration that the documentary dialectic does indeed continue and that it is only the names of the pubs that have changed.

EDGAR ANSTEY

## THE POLITICS OF THE SOVIET CINEMA 1917-1929

By Richard Taylor

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, £9.50

What Lenin Said About the Cinema is for English readers possibly his best-known dictum. It is certainly the most tediously quoted opinion in all film history. He appears to have made the remark in a conversation with Lunacharsky, the supremely enlightened People's Commissar for Enlightenment, in 1922, three years after the decree of 27 August 1919 nationalising all cinema enterprises in the Soviet Union. On the strength of that date the world at large has this year been fulsomely celebrating Sixty Glorious Years of Soviet Cinema. Richard Taylor's valuable study suggests that it was in fact a whole decade before the Soviet Union managed to come to grips with the organisation of a national cinema.

*The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1929*, one of the series of studies published for the Centre for International Studies of the London School of Economics and Political Science, is an exemplary work of research. Embarrassingly, Mr. Taylor shows up some 95 per cent of what is written about the cinema, and this period in particular, as hearsay, plagiarism, dogma and

received opinion. His acknowledgments speak of only two months' stay at Moscow University. They must have been phenomenally energetic, to judge from his work in combing contemporary newspapers, journals and reports. Even when dealing with better known areas of Soviet film, in his excellent summary of the war of film theories in the 20s, he turns up revealing and valuable quotations from Vertov, Kuleshov, Shklovsky et al. which appear never to have been published in English. (The brilliant Shklovsky, writing in the 20s, is already very shrewd about Vertov's 'artificial realism'. 'He takes newsreel as material. But we must admit that the very frames of Vertov are more interesting than what he has found in the newsreel. There is a director there. There is aesthetic consideration and invention'.)

Good history can make dispiriting reading. The story is less (as it has most often appeared before) a heartening trumpet of the ideals and achievements of the heroic age of revolution, than a sorry record of year after year of meetings and conferences and congresses and resolutions; endless talk, less thought, precious little action. The problems cannot be underestimated. To the general economic and political chaos of the times were added 'a combination of shortage of working capital, lack of co-operation between rival Soviet film organisations, absence of ideological control and shortage of skilled personnel... Even at this period it is true to say that, in the cinema at least, the right hand of the Soviet administrative machine did not know what the left hand was doing.'

Even the best and most successful endeavours were all too easily frustrated. The agit-trains and the agit-boat that were first sent out at the time of the Civil War were a marvellous undertaking. Yet 'one of the contemporary criticisms levelled at the staffing policy was that agit-

train journeys were seen as a kind of rest cure for ailing comrades...' In 1925 the provision of 1500 projectors seemed to be on the way to solving the problems of bringing films to rural areas; but within a year half of them were reckoned to be out of action, for lack of spare parts. To say nothing of the 'Comrades of the Berezovka district' who had 'lubricated the projector with tar instead of oil and then complained that it was not fit for use.'

In 1924 Stalin declared, in distorted echo of the recently dead Lenin, 'The cinema is the greatest means of mass agitation. The task is to take it into our own hands.' The task was not to be accomplished for another five years: only with the operation of the first Five Year Plan after 1928 did the Party finally take control. Mr. Taylor quotes an enthusiastic writer in 1929: 'And so from this point of view 1929 appears to us as the initial period of an organic transformation resting on the basis of socialist reconstruction.'

The preceding decade had been a long process of terrible disorganisation and half-hearted, garrulous bureaucratic struggles to overcome it. Paradoxically, though, these were also the greatest years of the Soviet film, the years of *Potemkin*, *Zvenigora*, *Mother*, *Dura Lex*, *The Man With the Movie Camera*, *The New Babylon*, the years of the great theoretical debates, the years of the crazy, beautiful, thrilling 'isms', of Eisenstein, Vertov, Kuleshov, Pudovkin, FEKS. The paradox is no paradox. The clue is in the words of a good Party man, Petrov-Bytov, writing in April 1929: 'When we talk of the Soviet cinema we have a banner on which is written: *Strike, Battleship Potemkin, October, Mother, The End of St. Petersburg*, and we have recently added *New Babylon, Zvenigora, Arsenal. Do 120 million workers and peasants march beneath this banner? I know very well that they don't.*'



*Potemkin* might have been advertised (on the poster illustrated on the jacket of this book) as 'The pride of the Soviet cinema'; and it might have won the enthusiasm of the intellectuals at home and abroad. But at the box-offices it lost out to *Robin Hood* and *Our Hospitality*. These American importations were not the stuff the Party and the regime wanted to see on Soviet screens, and they were not to remain on Soviet screens much longer. But neither were *Potemkin*, and those other films that were anathema to Petrov-Bytov, what was required by the new times. Eisenstein was to complete no film between 1929 and 1938. The 30s were to see Vertov and Kuleshov dwindle, and Pudovkin conform. The FEKS boys became men and tried to forget youthful follies. The cinema had new masters, new roles, new people. 'In the mobilisation of the masses during the first Five Year Plan,' concludes Richard Taylor, 'the cinema was to play an important part. In the 1920s Soviet film-makers had been able to portray reality as they saw it; in the 1930s they had to portray reality as the Party saw it. Reality as it really was yielded to reality as it ought to be, and that new reality was called "socialist realism".'

DAVID ROBINSON

#### CINEMA AND HISTORY: BRITISH NEWSREELS AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

By Anthony Aldgate

SCHOLAR PRESS, £12.00 (hardback),  
£5.95 (paperback)

As its title indicates, Anthony Aldgate's study is not one book, but several. He says as much in his introduction, in which he sets out his programme: to contribute to the 'current' debate about whether and under what conditions film can be a primary source for historical studies; to discuss how newsreels became an instrument of mass communication in the 1930s, and finally, and most importantly, to make a 'detailed examination of the film coverage of one particular event, the Spanish Civil War, by the British newsreel companies operating between 1936 and 1939.'

This choice of topics is not random. In order to understand how British newsreels dealt with the Spanish Civil War, Mr. Aldgate believes it is necessary to understand what their proprietors and managers and public authorities expected of them; by whom and under what conditions they were produced and distributed; and who their audiences were and, perhaps, what they made of them. In order to understand their value for the historian, it is essential to clarify their status as evidence.

No one, it seems to me, would want to quarrel with the first of Mr. Aldgate's convictions, though not everyone will necessarily follow where they lead him. The second is far less persuasive. Mr. Aldgate takes very seriously a distinction, once of great interest to professional historians, between primary and secondary sources. Primary sources, like diaries and cabinet papers, provide

direct evidence about the matters to which they relate. Secondary sources, like biographies and newspaper accounts of cabinet decisions, can never provide such direct evidence, because they are always mediated by third parties. The problem with films in general, and newsreels in particular, is that they claim to present an objective picture of reality, and so should count as primary sources. But since they are always 'manipulated' by directors, camera operators and editors, they must clearly be secondary sources.

Little progress in resolving this aching contradiction was possible, according to Mr. Aldgate, until the mid-1960s, when British historians advanced the daring idea that the same film could be treated as both a primary and a secondary source, depending on how it was used. Thus newsreels could be primary sources for studies of how the newsreels reported cabinet decisions, for example, and secondary sources for the study of those decisions. This point, that whether a source is primary or secondary depends not on properties inherent in it but on the questions which are asked of it, seems so obvious that it is hardly worth lingering over, so the fact that Mr. Aldgate feels he cannot properly begin his own study until he has exhaustively dealt with it should alert readers to the possibility that he may elsewhere direct his attention to non-problems or, having identified genuine problems, offer non-solutions to them.

The chapters on the organisation of newsreels and the context in which they operated do, indeed, confirm that the wary reader has much to be wary about. Mr. Aldgate, correctly in my view, identifies two areas of overriding concern: the fact that what interests historians about those who were involved in making and controlling newsreels is their motives and intentions; and that what is interesting about audiences is how they understood and reacted to the messages delivered to them through the newsreels. But having accepted this judgment, he immediately undermines the value of his own efforts by agreeing that on the one hand the motives of his historical figures must always remain matters of speculation and conjecture; and on the other that it is equally a matter of conjecture whether the messages transmitted by the newsreels were ever understood by the audiences to whom they were directed.

Not, of course, that he says so in quite so many words. But so far as audience reactions to Spanish Civil War newsreels are concerned, to the extent that he discusses the matter at all, Mr. Aldgate relies heavily on Mass Observation interviews, and on the 1943 wartime social survey, both of which were carried out after the Civil War and neither of which were concerned with newsreels of the Civil War period. So far as the motives and intentions of his principal characters are concerned, he relies with equal disingenuousness on 1930s professional and trade journals, and the personal recollections of five industry veterans. Not surprisingly, some of his conjectures are rather thin. He appears to attribute E. V. H.

Emmett's 'light, witty and tongue in cheek' commentary style to the fact that he had 'trained for the Stock Exchange and joined Gaumont as a cutter in their silent days'; and to believe that the influence of the Harmsworth family on Movietone was obvious because its general manager, Sir Gordon Craig, was a 'Liverman of the Gold and Silver Wyre Drawers Company, Vice-President of the "Old Contemptibles" Association, and President of the Hackney Branch of the British Legion.'

Sometimes the conjectures are not even his own. Of another commentator, Roy de Groot, he says that he 'was strongest on drama and tragedy, reportedly putting so much feeling into his description of the funeral of King George V that Pathé News of America released the British version in their cinemas throughout the United States.' And sometimes they appear to be self-contradictory, as when he tartly observes of a 1937 Paramount story that 'it is obvious how, through the choice of camera angles, this film of General Franco holding a youth parade in Burgos goes out of its way to romanticise and even glorify him'; only to claim a few pages later that cameramen were never instructed to follow 'political standpoints', nor would they have obeyed such instructions, because their sense of professionalism ensured that they would never let any political judgments—including their own—influence their work.

When discussing the newsreels' 'messages' themselves, Mr. Aldgate falls into a deep trap, and though it is

one of his own making its contours resemble all those dug for themselves by practitioners of the intoxicating art of content analysis. Mr. Aldgate does not doubt that 'it is possible to isolate and identify the messages'. In other words, we may not know why Civil War newsreels said what they did, or who understood what they were saying. But at least we know what they said. Or do we?

Of course it's possible for any analyst to 'identify and isolate' messages to his or her satisfaction, but what of those who do not share the analyst's assumptions? The message of the 1937 Paramount story of General Franco at Burgos—even though its commentary track no longer exists—appears to Mr. Aldgate to be clear enough. Moorish troops pose in 'extravagantly heroic gestures'. Franco's young supporters are 'beautiful Spanish girls' and 'well groomed men'. Moreover, the 'exoticism, almost easternness, of the setting is highlighted strongly'. But this colourful description is not of much use to anyone who does not have prior knowledge of Mr. Aldgate's ideas about heroism, feminine beauty or male grooming, or how exotic a setting must be before it qualifies as 'eastern'—and, most important of all, is certain that Mr. Aldgate's sensibility is in total harmony with the spirit of the 30s.

None of these deficiencies need have been fatal in itself, but their cumulative effect is gravely to compromise the value of much of Mr. Aldgate's study. This is hardly surprising. A study which promises to examine motive and content, and

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leaves motive unexamined except in the most trivial sense and shows itself incapable of describing content unambiguously, is bound to be disappointing. The irony is that Mr. Aldgate, who is a lecturer at the Open University and has himself directed a film on the Spanish Civil War for the Inter-University Film Consortium, is the victim of the success of the movement to which he has contributed. Had this work appeared a decade ago, it would have been acclaimed as a pioneering study, even by those who doubted the possibility of carrying out its programme. But enough has been done in the past ten years to make the terrain where film and history meet one which requires more sophistication and subtlety to negotiate than is evident in this book.

JERRY KUEHL

## THE SHATTERED SILENTS

By Alexander Walker

ELM TREE BOOKS, £7.95

The flood of film books has at last abated. Film history has been so thoroughly scrutinised that students of the subject cannot reasonably expect anything fresh. Which is why *The Shattered Silents* comes as such a surprise. Alexander Walker reveals that while the progress of sound has been chronicled, historians tend to skip the most vital period—from the middle of 1926 to the end of 1929. 'It is as if the film historian's needle has jumped violently several grooves,' says Walker. 'There are a few stuttering references of an obligatory nature—Vitaphone ... Al Jolson ... *The Jazz Singer* ... and then, with audible relief, one is back on the track with the guide lines of the new era again observable ...'

Walker's study is a casebook of an industrial revolution. And a casebook, with its implications of psychiatry, is appropriate, for the arrival of sound triggered far more breakdowns than those of a merely

mechanical nature. 'There has been no revolution like it,' says Walker. 'It passed with such breakneck speed, at such inflationary cost, with such ruthless self-interest, that a whole art form was sundered and consigned to history almost before anyone could count the cost in economic terms or guess the consequences in human ones—and certainly before anyone could keep an adequate record of it.'

Talking films had been around long before *The Jazz Singer*. Edison was releasing talking pictures in 1913, and D. W. Griffith had synchronised dialogue in part of his *Dream Street* (1921). But the idea failed to catch on. For audiences never thought of their movies as silent. They never talked about 'silent movies' until sound came in. And silent was just what they weren't. A film was never shown publicly without music—and music and silent films were inseparable. By the late 'teens, picture palaces provided symphony orchestras with anything up to a hundred players. Add to that the roar of a vast Wurlitzer organ, and you have a level of sound impossible to reproduce on an optical track.

The drawback lay with the small-town theatres. Here the accompaniment was more restricted. If these theatres were wired for sound, thought the promoters, they could have music by the best orchestras—which would remain in perfect synchronisation! It was with this idealistic notion that the silents were shattered. For as soon as life was given to the creation it became a Frankenstein monster and turned on its creators. No one thought the canned music superior to live music—whereas audiences were riveted by dialogue, even such snatches as they heard in *The Jazz Singer*. Radio was the unwitting culprit. For radio, together with the telephone, had supplied the technology. And radio had attuned people's ears to canned dialogue, and made them miss it at the movies. The talkie revolution took place in the home.

Walker's story opens with a

chilling description of a radio broadcast by United Artists stars in March 1928: Mary Pickford, John Barrymore, Gloria Swanson, Norma Talmadge, Charlie Chaplin ... the line-up was perhaps the strongest in film history—enough to capture the entire nation. Yet in some small theatres demonstrations broke out. 'After ten minutes,' reported one manager, 'the entire audience started to razz and the theatre had to switch back to its regular performance.' In Detroit, Norma Talmadge was openly cat-called. Refunds were demanded. 'All in all,' says Walker, 'it was a bad omen for the talkies.'

To compare some of the sound films of 1928 with the silents of the same year is to see a gulf in quality and intelligence that approximates to that between Poulenc and punk rock. Not only is the camera battened down, so are the aesthetics. (But I remember the panic that seized me when I first directed a sequence in the presence of a microphone—and that was thirty years after talkies came in!)

Walker shows sympathy for the players and technicians whose careers were injured by the arrival of sound, but he is at pains to point out that virtually no one was ruined by it. 'John Gilbert was not the victim of "white voice", as high-pitched tones were euphemistically called, but of poor studio thinking that did not foresee how a Great Lover's romantic ardour would sound embarrassingly foolish to latter-day ears.'

No one could deny that sound added a vital dimension to the art of the film—but sound obliterated a universal language. And Walker, unlike other writers on the subject, understands this. He is able to evoke the appeal of a silent without downplaying the significance of sound. And he writes with an enviable ease of imagery, even when describing the sound effects of a 1929 Western, and an ability to compress a complex idea into a single sentence. Few have explored this area before him—

although he pays warm tribute to Harry Geduld's *Birth of the Talkies*, which covers the years up to *The Jazz Singer*. He has done extensive research in such trade papers as *Variety* and unearthed much fresh information; John Gilbert's voice, for instance, was first heard in a 1928 short, *Voices Across the Sea*, dealing with the opening of the Empire Theatre, Leicester Square. Ironies are everywhere: Chaplin defending 'the great beauty of silence' and Al Jolson retorting 'I was at a party the other night and from 8.30 to 5 a.m. Charlie never stopped talking.' Walker gives the last word to director William C. de Mille: 'Within two years, our little old Hollywood was gone and in its place stood a fair, new city talking a new language, having different manners and customs, a more terrifying city full of strange faces, less friendly, more businesslike, twice as populous—and much more cruel.'

KEVIN BROWNLOW

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DON ALLEN is senior lecturer in Modern Languages and Film Studies at the West London Institute of Higher Education; author of *Truffaut* (1974) and consultant and co-ordinating editor on *The Book of the Cinema* (Mitchell Beazley, 1979)... PATRICK MCINROY is a freelance writer and scriptwriter of educational and industrial films; has taught film history at the University of Texas... JEFFREY MEYERS, Professor of English at the University of Colorado, is the author of three books on George Orwell... VINCENT PORTER is an independent member of the Cinematograph Films Council, but points out that the views expressed in his article should not be taken as representing those of the CFC... NORMAN SWALLOW has worked in television since 1950 and is currently a producer-director for Granada; author of *Factual Television* and *Eisenstein, a Documentary Portrait*.

## Film Policy for the 80s from page 223

results from year to year over all the films in which it has invested, so there is no real change envisaged here. The second related point, about it being financed so that it could take risks on films like others in business, is also suspect. The key point is that no responsible investor invests in any project which does not look commercially attractive at the time when the money is being invested. What has to be argued is that if the volume of finance is increased, then the number of projects can be increased and thus the chances of the total investment being lost are reduced.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the marriage of financial probity and national culture proposed for the NFFC is an impossible mix to achieve without substantially modifying the commercial relations between the Corporation and the exhibition sector of the industry, and in particular to maximise returns from the UK box office. According to a recent letter to the *Daily*

*Telegraph* (3 July 1979) from Michael Meacher, the Labour Government proposed to do this by easing the financial tasks of the British Film Authority, which would have been charged with a similar cultural role, in two key ways. First, the Labour Government intended to assign public funds to the Authority to carry out its cultural functions. Industry gossip sets the figure at £7 million. Second, it proposed to make it a condition of licensing cinemas for public exhibition that they showed, for a specific proportion of screentime, indigenously British films which the BFA registered for that purpose. Without these two crucial financial props it looks as though, in the long term, the NFFC may have to choose either to abandon its cultural *raison d'être* and survive commercially or to pursue its cultural role until the Government is forced either to wind it up or to bail it out with public funds.

The proposals for restructuring the NFFC with a cultural role which come from the Secretary of State for Trade are inextricably bound up with the institutional debris of a

failed industrial policy. They are neither fish, fowl nor good red meat—simply cultural red herrings. If the NFFC is to have a cultural role, and if ever increasing proportions of the Eady Levy are to be used to fund cultural institutions such as the NFFC, the National Film School, the British Film Institute Production Board, then these matters are properly the responsibility of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Furthermore, whether the industry likes it or not, the automatic distribution of the Eady Levy is contrary to EEC policy and will probably be rejected by the EEC Commission when it comes up for renewal in parliament. And since, as Joop Voogd points out in his Report of the Committee on Culture and Education of the Council of Europe on *Cinema and the State*, to have no policy is indeed to have a covert policy of leaving cultural strategies to other forces, let that decision, if it is to be British policy, be taken by the Minister responsible, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

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# Letters

## John Ford's War

SIR,—With reference to 'John Ford's War' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1979), a number of corrections.

Pp. 102: '...Armistead began to develop...an aerial reconnaissance technique which was called "low-level oblique"...' This technique was first developed and employed by RAF P.R.U. squadrons in the Mediterranean. (See *Evidence in Camera* by Constance Babington-Smith.)

Pp. 102: '... (C)hosen by Ford to go in with the Rangers on the day before the main invasion...' Elements of the U.S. Army's Second Ranger battalion landed on the scree at the base of the Point du Hoc shortly after first light on the morning of June 6th. The first Allied forces to make contact with the Germans were elements of the 101st Airborne Division at 0245 near St. Mère Eglise. The first Allied units to physically land on French soil were from the British First Airborne Division, who parachuted into their drop zones at approximately six minutes after midnight on the night of June 5th/6th.

Pp. 102: '... (T)he cruiser *Augustus*...' The U.S.S. *Augusta* (no 's') acted as Flag, Western Task Force for 'Neptune' (the naval portion of 'Overlord').

Pp. 104: The Field Photographic Branches '...examining the effect of the thousand bomber raids...' This activity, the report of which fills over 2,000 pages of extremely small type, was world-wide. It was set up by General 'Hap' Arnold and Air Marshal Tedder. In the United States it was published in 70 volumes as the *United States Strategic Bombing Survey*.

Pp. 104: '... The Vice-admiral (in command of the *Missouri*)...' The *Missouri* (BB-63) would have been commanded by a captain. The vice-admiral aboard would have been the Task Force commander.

Pp. 104: '... (R)epplied that no American battleship had ever done that [fired a full broadside on the same bearing] for fear of turning turtle...' Preliminary gunnery trials for all United States battleships, cruisers and destroyers included the firing of full broadsides at maximum elevation, maximum range and, of necessity, using full ballistic charges. U.S.S. *Washington* (BB-56) fired over 30 such broadsides during the battle of Santa Cruz Island.

The foregoing corrections are not meant to reflect upon SIGHT AND SOUND or its staff. I bring them to your attention (there are several other, similar errors in the text) in the hopes that persons wishing an

accurate biography of John Ford shall be dissuaded from purchasing Mr. Sinclair's compendium of errors.

Yours faithfully,

TERRY W. JACKSON

San Francisco, California.

## Mizoguchi

SIR,—Your readers may be interested to know that in Shindo Kaneto's memoir of Mizoguchi Kenji called *Aru Eiga Kantoku* (*A Certain Film Director*), Iwanami, 1976, there is a reference to the film now released in England as *My Love has been Burning* (*Waga koi wa Moemu*), 1949. 'This too was a crushing failure. It depicted Oi Kentaro of the Freedom and Human Rights Movement, and the forerunner of Women's Liberation, Kageyama Hideko, but Mizoguchi Kenji extended neither hand nor foot towards the intelligence of woman. He was clumsy in handling human beings on the level of thought' (p. 44).

Yours faithfully,

London, S.W.16. JOHN CLARK

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

20TH CENTURY-FOX for *La Luna*, *An Italian Woman*, *Alien*, *Bigger than Life*.

UNITED ARTISTS for *Manhattan*, *Hair*.

CIC for *Pretty Baby*, *Prophecy*.

RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Eagle's Wing*, *They Might be Giants*.

GALA FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *L'Homme qui aimait les Femmes*, *L'Argent de Poche*.

BRUT PRODUCTIONS for *Fingers*.

CINEGATE for *The American Friend*.

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Old Boyfriends*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *A Knife in the Head*, *Woyzeck*.

CONNOISSEUR FILMS for *Man of Marble*.

NEW WORLD for *Saint Jack*.

OSIRIS FILMS for *Germany in Autumn*.

WHEEL PRODUCTIONS for *The Human Factor*.

BOB GODFREY FILMS for *Dream Doll*.

FILMVERLAG DER AUTOREN for *The Third Generation*.

FILMS DU CARROSSE for *L'Amour en Fuite*, *La Chambre Verte*.

SECKER AND WARBURG for photograph of George Orwell.

ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS AND SCIENCES for *The Immortal Alamo*, *An Unwilling Cowboy*, Star Ranch photograph.

NORMAN SWALLOW for photographs of G. N. Alexandrov.

JAMES NARES for *Rome '78*.

DAVID WILSON for TV election photographs taken from the screen.

BFI PRODUCTION BOARD for *Radio On*.

NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *Circus*, *Jazz Comedy*, *We Can't Go Home Again*, *In a Lonely Place*, *Bitter Victory*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, *Big Jim McLain*, *Eldorado*, *Horse Soldiers*, *Adventure's End*.

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# Film Guide

## \*ALIEN (Fox)

S-f hokum about spacecraft with an unwelcome extra passenger. Impressive special effects and a gruesomely convincing monster fail to offset the increasingly tired plot. A sort of inverse relationship to Howard Hawks' *The Thing* invites unfavourable comparisons. (Tom Skerritt, John Hurt, Sigourney Weaver; director, Ridley Scott.) *Reviewed.*

## \*AVALANCHE EXPRESS (Fox)

The plot, characters and action highlights of this transcontinental spy saga are strictly formula, but pell-mell direction and editing perform a precarious, oddly suspenseful balancing act of their own. By the end, every glossy cliché is reduced to intriguing abstraction. (Robert Shaw, Lee Marvin, Linda Evans; director, Mark Robson.)

## BEYOND THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Salvage-hunters board the upturned liner and discover—to ludicrous effect—fire, flood and some highly histrionic survivors. Hopefully the 'Poseidon' may now be allowed to sink in peace. (Michael Caine, Sally Field, Telly Savalas; director, Irwin Allen.)

## BLOODLINE (CIC)

The acme of prefabricated best-sellerdom, with Audrey Hepburn inheriting a pharmaceutical empire and being besieged by a royal flush of nasty cousins, one of whom is distinctly homicidal. (Ben Gazzara, James Mason, Omar Sharif, Romy Schneider; director, Terence Young.)

## BOULEVARD NIGHTS (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Petty warfare among the Los Angeles *chicanos*. Good location photography and details, but the story is routine juvenile delinquency sob stuff. (Richard Yñiguez, Danny de la Paz; director, Michael Pressman.)

## \*BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25th CENTURY (CIC)

Amiable s-f comic strip, leaning rather too consciously on *Star Wars* but with an engaging performance by Gil Gerard. Patchy direction by Daniel Haller, funniest when not trying too hard. (Pamela Hensley, Henry Silva.)

## \*CHINA SYNDROME, THE (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

A precise but appealingly ambivalent performance from Jane Fonda—as a media person who finds both a cause and a career boost in a nuclear energy crisis—centres this melodramatic account of how Harrisburg might have happened. (Jack Lemmon, Michael Douglas; director, James Bridges.)

## \*DRACULA (CIC)

Special effects are all in this new rendering of the old bloodcurdler, but deployed with a tactful sense of style that makes an entertaining retelling without at all reinterpreting. Frank Langella's Dracula is an effective period ladykiller, although the Edwardian setting is really only decoration. (Laurence Olivier, Kate Nelligan, Donald Pleasence; director, John Badham.)

## \*EAGLE'S WING (Rank)

English director Anthony Harvey

succeeds remarkably in making a 'new' Western, which ironically watches as the European presence takes hold in the New World and one white trapper chases his dream across the horizon. A complex, quizzical film (with fine performances by Martin Sheen and Sam Waterston), steadily drained of all dialogue to concentrate on the peculiarly circular action. (Stéphane Audran, Caroline Langrishe, Harvey Keitel.) *Reviewed.*

## ELVIS (GTO)

A TV-movie from John Carpenter, the whizz-kid of the new B-pictures, which disappointingly sticks to the hagiographic norm in its account of Elvis Presley's rise and fall. Heartaches come and go as profusely as songs, but mother love and the magic of stardom march triumphantly on. (Kurt Russell, Shelley Winters, Pat Hingle.)

## \*\*EUROPEANS, THE (Enterprise)

One of Henry James' early ironic comedies, in which a staid New England household is thrown into disarray by the visit of Europeanised kinsfolk. Very elegantly shot and scripted (by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala), but surprisingly with rather less Jamesian implication than the Merchant-Ivory *Hullabaloo* over *George and Bonnie's Pictures*. (Lee Remick, Tim Woodward, Lisa Eichhorn; director, James Ivory.)

## \*\*FEDORA (Mainline)

Billy Wilder's latest treatise on the myths of Hollywood, and the deceptions and disguises its luminaries get up to. Largely misunderstood as an attempt to repeat *Sunset Boulevard*, *Fedora* is more distanced and ironic, rife with Wilderian gallows humour and a sumptuous sense of decay in never-never land. (William Holden, Marthe Keller, Hildegard Knef.)

## \*\*FOUR NIGHTS OF A DREAMER (Artificial Eye)

Bresson's version of Dostoevsky's 'White Nights'. Pure magic. Situated chronologically between *Une Femme Douce* and *Lancelot du Lac*, it was reviewed, with interview, in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Winter 1971/72. (Isabelle Weingarten, Guillaume des Forêts.)

## \*\*HAIR (United Artists)

Milos Forman's opened-out adaptation of the famous late-60s rock musical boasts an intermittently lively surface and some spirited Twyla Tharp choreography, but winds up hollow, dated and self-congratulatory. Nicholas Ray makes a striking guest appearance. (John Savage, Treat Williams, Beverly D'Angelo.) *Reviewed.*

## IN-LAWS, THE (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Wearisomely unfunny spies-and-gangsters comedy. Even without Arthur Hiller's flat-footed direction to slow it down, the script never amounts to more than a ragbag of uninspired sketches. Bob Hope did it all far better back in the 40s. (Peter Falk, Alan Arkin.)

## \*\*LAST CHANTS FOR A LOW DANCE (The Other Cinema)

These reverberating 'chants' for the closed, hopeless life of a Montana truck-driver fuse, with unexpected success, elements of mainstream commercial cinema with film-maker Jon Jost's individual style of subversive, low-budget experimentation. (Tom Blair.)

## LIFESPAN (Respectable Films)

Updated mad scientist yarn set in Amsterdam, which makes a promising start with Klaus Kinski lurking sinistinely on the sidelines, then gradually bogs down in prosaic narrative and some incoherently inflated pretensions. (Tina Aumont, Hiram Keller; director, Alexander Whitelaw.)

## LITTLE ROMANCE, A (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

A teen romance set in Paris, which George Roy Hill seems to envisage as a Truffautesque fantasy, with a cinéophile hero admiringly watching a dubbed Butch and Sundance. The

precarious soufflé collapses when Laurence Olivier enters as an eye-rolling, whimsical French con man. (Diane Lane, Thelonus Bernard.)

## \*\*LOVE AT FIRST BITE (Barber Dann)

Genuinely funny Dracula parody in which the Count (perfectly played by George Hamilton as a 30s romantic hero) is bemused by his exile to the New York of today's swinging neuroses. Visually erratic, but script and performances more than make up. (Susan Saint James, Richard Benjamin, Arte Johnson; director, Stan Dragoti.)

## \*MAFU CAGE, THE (Tedderwick)

Karen Arthur can't make much of the psycho-sexual mumbo-jumbo in this hothouse study of two weird sisters living in a California mansion. But moments of considerable visual elegance and some melodramatic flourishes in the latter stages prove unexpectedly diverting. (Carol Kane, Lee Grant, Will Geer.)

## MAIN EVENT, THE (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Howard Zieff continues to belie his early promise (*Slither*, *Hearts of the West*) with this predictable comic vehicle for Barbra Streisand's domineering brand of knock-'em-flat repartee, in which everyone else (including Ryan O'Neal) takes a back seat. Zieff's throwaway touch and some well-tuned support playing glimmer occasionally, but the main event is undoubtedly Ms Streisand herself. (James Gregory, Whitman Mayo.)

## \*\*MANHATTAN (United Artists)

Woody Allen back on form with variations on the theme of nervous romance among New York's funky chic intelligentsia. Echoing *Annie Hall* in the edge and feeling of its social comedy, the new film surpasses it in the formal audacity of some Felliniesque frescoes in black and white Panavision. (Woody Allen, Diane Keaton, Michael Murphy, Mariel Hemingway.) *Reviewed.*

## \*\*MAN OF MARBLE (Connoisseur)

Wajda's magnificent exploration of fallen idols and rising opportunists involves a parallel investigation into the manipulative techniques of films and politicians. His illustrated history of post-war Poland is at the same time a quest for some elusive, Eastern bloc 'Rosebud'. (Jerzy Radziwillowicz, Krystyna Janda.) *Reviewed.*

## MOONRAKER (United Artists)

James Bond reaches Outer Space, saving the world all over again in an exploit that has precious little connection with Ian Fleming. Conspicuously expensive production values, but an unmistakably cut-price plot. (Roger Moore, Lois Chiles, Michael Lonsdale; director, Lewis Gilbert.)

## \*\*MY LOVE HAS BEEN BURNING (Cinegate)

Minor Mizoguchi, more fascinating for its sub-theme (the introduction of party politics into Japan) than for its heartfelt but over-explicit plea for the emancipation of women. (Kinuyo Tanaka, Mitsuko Mito.)

## NORMA RAE (Fox)

A political fable about the unionisation of a textile mill in the South, in which issues and attitudes are pre-set despite the looseness and surface 'realism' of Martin Ritt's direction. Genuine emotion occasionally insinuates itself in Sally Field's indefatigably plucky, puckish performance. (Beau Bridges, Ron Leibman.)

## \*OLD BOYFRIENDS (Artificial Eye)

Joan Tewkesbury's directorial debut is a little soft and toneless, and Paul Schrader's script—about a married woman who attempts to find out who she is by rediscovering who she was with old boyfriends—over-determined and mechanical. The downbeat, not quite lyrical ending is a pleasant surprise. (Talia Shire, Richard Jordan, Keith Carradine.) *Reviewed.*

## \*PERFECT COUPLE, A (Fox)

Robert Altman's attempt to counterpoint two life styles (sloppy hippie, patriarchal Greek) by way of two musical/theatrical conventions. Fascinating, though it doesn't really work and the central relationship emerges uncomfortably akin to *Marty*. (Paul Dooley, Marta Heflin.)

## \*PLAYERS (CIC)

Love and redemption on the international tennis circuit. Anthony Harvey builds some real tension in the on-court scenes, though the romantic fiction remains dispiritingly limp. Promising debut by Dean-Paul Martin; splendid cameo from Pancho Gonzalez. (Ali MacGraw, Maximilian Schell.)

## \*\*PRETTY BABY (CIC)

Another of Louis Malle's teasingly topsy-turvy moralities in which he discovers the rose in the canker. Gorgeously set in a New Orleans bordello, all Naughty Nineties, Joplin rags and Renoir nudes. (Brooke Shields, Keith Carradine, Susan Sarandon.) *Reviewed.*

## PROPHECY (CIC)

An ecological horror film, which hopefully prepares for its demented, mutated monster with plenty of scientific data about methyl mercury poisoning (a paper mill is the culprit). Mad bruin eventually runs amok amidst the pretensions, although an old Indian nicely explains how his home used to be the 'garden of Eden'. (Talia Shire, Robert Foxworth; director, John Frankenheimer.)

## QUADROPHENIA (Brent Walker)

A working-class lad is beset by discontent and growing pains in director Franc Roddam's glossy, heavily meaningful portrait of mid-60s England, the era of—in retrospect—rather bogus 'gang wars' between Mods and Rockers. Unpleasant and frequently unconvincing stereotypes abound. (Phil Daniels, Leslie Ash.)

## \*\*QUINTET (Fox)

Altman's oddest, most perverse 'experiment' yet. A post-holocaust fable whose meaning seems to have more to do with Altman's feelings about his art and grievances about the 'System'. Pleasingly intransigent, with effectively chilly decor and bemused all-star cast. (Paul Newman, Bibi Andersson, Fernando Rey, Nina Van Pallandt.)

## \*ROGER CORMAN: HOLLYWOOD'S WILD ANGEL (Cinegate)

Not so much a study of the Hollywood phenomenon whose products and protégés are now legion as a monster trailer for the exploitation output of his New World studio. Entertaining enough but something less than a definitive portrait. (Director, Christian Blackwood.)

## SAINT JACK (New World)

Peter Bogdanovich returns to the Corman stable. Paul Theroux's novel about down and out expatriates in Singapore should make for nifty storytelling, but Bogdanovich bungles the chance by muddling the plot and indulging the characters. (Ben Gazzara, Denholm Elliott, Peter Bogdanovich.)

## \*THAT SUMMER! (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

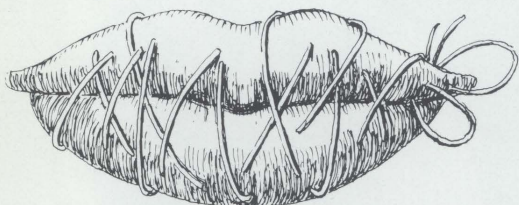
Uneasy marriage of the cosy ethics of the Children's Film Foundation (director Harley Cokliss' training ground) and social realism (the hero is an ex-Borstal boy trying to make good). Assorted teenagers descend on Torquay for the summer, and Cokliss draws a portrait of seaside life that is both convincing and attractive, with excellent performances from the young actors. (Ray Winstone, Tony London, Emily Moore, Julie Shipley.)

## \*\*WOYZECK (Contemporary)

Herzog's very fine and very faithful rendering of Büchner's play: a meeting of minds so perfect that one would almost swear it must be a Herzog original. (Klaus Kinski, Eva Mattes.) *Reviewed.*



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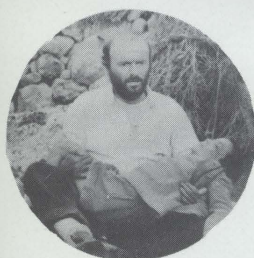
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